**Jewish Anti-Zionism in New York: Diaspora Dissent, Israel, Palestine, and the Collapse of the Postwar Zionist Consensus**

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New York has long been a symbolic capital of Jewish diaspora life, American liberal politics, Zionist fundraising, media influence, and public argument over Israel. Yet the city is now also a visible center of Jewish anti-Zionist activism, where groups, writers, students, clergy, and dissidents increasingly separate Jewish identity from loyalty to the Israeli state. This paper examines that rupture as a historical, theological, generational, and institutional crisis inside American Jewish life. It argues that Jewish anti-Zionism is not merely an external critique adopted from the political left, but an internal diaspora revolt against the postwar fusion of Jewish memory, Holocaust trauma, U.S. foreign policy, and Israeli state power. New York matters because the conflict is staged where Jewish institutional authority is strongest and where public dissent is hardest to marginalize. The paper treats figures such as Max Blumenthal, Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, Haredi anti-Zionists, and mainstream Zionist institutions as actors in a widening struggle over who may speak as a Jew, what Judaism requires, and whether Jewish survival depends on Zionism or liberation from it.

Keywords: Jewish anti-Zionism, New York City, American Jews, Zionism, Israel Palestine, Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow, Max Blumenthal, diaspora Judaism, post-Zionism, anti-Zionist Jews, Jewish dissent, Gaza war, American Jewish identity, Zionist institutions, Jewish political theology, Israel lobby, Judaism and Zionism, Palestinian solidarity, U.S. foreign policy.

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**1. Introduction: New York and the Jewish Anti-Zionist Rupture**

The emergence of a visible Jewish anti-Zionist movement in New York marks one of the most significant internal fractures in modern American Jewish political life. For decades, the public face of organized Jewish authority in the United States was shaped by an assumed alignment between Jewish continuity, Holocaust memory, support for Israel, and participation in American liberal-democratic institutions. That alignment was never total, and it always had dissenters, but it functioned as a dominant communal grammar. To be publicly Jewish in institutional settings often meant, at minimum, accepting Israel as a central fact of Jewish collective identity and, in many circles, as an object of moral obligation. Today that grammar is breaking down. Anti-Zionist Jews in New York increasingly reject the premise that Jewish identity requires loyalty to the Israeli state, that Jewish safety depends on Israeli military superiority, or that criticism of Zionism can be dismissed as hatred of Jews.

This rupture is not merely a disagreement over Israeli policy. It is a struggle over the meaning of Jewish peoplehood itself. The conflict concerns whether Judaism is primarily a covenantal, ethical, diasporic, religious, cultural, or national identity; whether the Holocaust requires support for a sovereign Jewish state; whether Jewish trauma can justify Palestinian dispossession; and whether American Jewish institutions have confused communal survival with alignment to state power. The language of anti-Zionist Jewish dissent has grown sharper because the historical stakes have grown sharper. The Gaza war, the scale of Palestinian suffering, the hardening of Israeli political culture, and the visible role of American money, weapons, lobbying, and media discipline have forced many Jews, especially younger Jews, to confront a question that older communal institutions often tried to contain: what if the central political project presented as the guarantor of Jewish survival has become a source of moral catastrophe?

New York is the essential setting for this confrontation because it is not peripheral to Jewish public life. It is one of the world's great Jewish cities, a center of diaspora culture, finance, publishing, academia, philanthropy, electoral politics, synagogue life, journalism, and protest. Jewish anti-Zionism in New York therefore cannot be treated as a marginal anomaly. It appears at the symbolic center of the very world that postwar Zionist consensus helped organize. When anti-Zionist Jews march in New York, interrupt speeches, organize vigils, join Palestinian solidarity coalitions, challenge donors, or reject the authority of national Jewish organizations, they are not simply speaking as outside radicals. They are contesting legitimacy from inside the house.

This paper begins from the premise that Jewish anti-Zionism is not new, but that its present visibility in New York represents a new historical stage. Earlier forms of Jewish anti-Zionism existed among religious traditionalists, socialist internationalists, Bundists, diasporists,

assimilationists, and anti-nationalist intellectuals. What is new is the degree to which anti-Zionist language now circulates among younger American Jews formed by progressive politics, social media, human rights discourse, intersectional activism, and a deep suspicion of state violence. Their revolt is not only against Israel. It is also against the older American Jewish institutional order that disciplined dissent by equating Jewish loyalty with Zionist attachment.

The result is a crisis of representation. Who speaks as a Jew? The synagogue rabbi, the federation executive, the university donor, the Israeli consul, the anti-Zionist organizer, the Haredi dissident, the Palestinian solidarity activist, the journalist exposing lobbying networks, or the student refusing inherited communal narratives? The answer is no longer obvious. The old consensus depended on the ability of institutional leaders to define the acceptable boundaries of Jewish speech. The new rupture shows that those boundaries are collapsing.

### 1.1 New York as Diaspora Capital

New York occupies a unique place in modern Jewish history. It is not merely a city with a large Jewish population; it is a symbolic capital of diaspora Jewish life. Its neighborhoods, newspapers, schools, universities, synagogues, publishing houses, philanthropic networks, museums, unions, political clubs, and intellectual circles have shaped American Jewish identity for more than a century. The city has held together contradictions that are central to Jewish modernity: immigrant memory and elite assimilation, religious tradition and secular culture, socialism and capitalism, Zionism and diasporism, Holocaust memorialization and American upward mobility.

Because of this density, New York functions as a stage on which Jewish conflicts become visible before they are nationally legible. Arguments that elsewhere remain private or communal become public in New York. A protest outside a Manhattan institution, a disruption at a synagogue event, a student encampment, an op-ed, a donor revolt, a rabbinical statement, or a mass arrest of Jewish activists can rapidly become a national symbol. The city converts internal dissent into public drama.

New York also matters because it has long been one of the principal American nodes of Zionist institutional power. Fundraising, media influence, cultural prestige, political access, philanthropic legitimacy, and advocacy networks all converge there. This does not mean that Jewish New York is monolithic. It has never been monolithic. Rather, it means that the city contains unusually concentrated forms of both Zionist authority and Jewish dissent. The anti-Zionist movement is powerful in New York precisely because it confronts the institutional center rather than speaking from a safe distance.

The city's Jewish population also contains deep internal diversity. There are secular Jews, Reform Jews, Conservative Jews, Orthodox Jews, Haredi Jews, Hasidic communities, Israeli

expatriates, Russian-speaking Jews, Mizrahi and Sephardi communities, progressive activists, conservative donors, academics, artists, journalists, and political operatives. Each carries a different relationship to Israel, Jewish memory, American power, and Palestinian suffering. Any serious account of Jewish anti-Zionism in New York must therefore avoid reducing Jews to a single political mind. The importance of the current rupture lies exactly in the fact that Jewish opinion is divided, visibly and increasingly.

New York's public culture intensifies that division. The city rewards moral theater, public confrontation, intellectual provocation, and symbolic acts. Jewish anti-Zionist groups have used that environment effectively. They understand that a protest by Jews against Israel in New York carries a different meaning from a protest by non-Jewish activists elsewhere. It challenges the claim that Zionist institutions speak for the Jewish people. It deprives pro-Israel organizations of the simple binary in which Jews are presumed to stand on one side and critics of Israel on the other. In New York, Jewish anti-Zionists can say, in effect: the argument is not between Jews and their enemies; it is inside Jewish life itself.

That is why the New York scene deserves close study. It reveals the transformation of Jewish dissent from a marginal intellectual tradition into a public movement capable of challenging communal authority, media narratives, and political discipline. The city is not merely the location of the rupture. It is part of the mechanism by which the rupture becomes historically significant.

**1.2 From External Criticism to Internal Jewish Dissent**

For much of the postwar period, criticism of Israel in American public life was often framed as external pressure on the Jewish community. Critics of Zionism were commonly imagined as Arabs, Palestinians, leftist radicals, Soviet propagandists, antisemites, Christian critics, or foreign adversaries. This framing allowed organized Jewish institutions to treat defense of Israel as a communal boundary marker. To stand with Israel was to stand with the Jewish people; to criticize Israel too sharply was to risk being placed outside the circle of legitimate concern.

That framework is now unstable because a growing portion of the criticism comes from Jews themselves. Jewish anti-Zionist dissent disrupts the older structure of accusation. When Jews publicly oppose Zionism, call for Palestinian liberation, reject Israeli state violence, or describe Zionism as incompatible with Jewish ethics, institutional defenders of Israel face a more difficult task. They can still accuse such Jews of betrayal, ignorance, self-hatred, naïveté, or collaboration with antisemitism, and they often do. But the presence of Jewish dissenters makes it harder to sustain the claim that opposition to Zionism is simply opposition to Jews.

This shift is historically important because internal dissent carries a different kind of authority. A non-Jewish critic of Israel may be dismissed as hostile, uninformed, or motivated by prejudice. A

Jewish critic cannot be dismissed in the same way without opening a conflict over Jewish legitimacy. The question becomes not only whether Israel is right or wrong, but whether the institutions claiming to define Jewish interest have the authority to discipline Jews who disagree.

The present Jewish anti-Zionist movement therefore represents a crisis of communal sovereignty. American Jewish institutions are accustomed to speaking in the name of Jewish safety, continuity, and moral memory. Anti-Zionist Jews challenge that claim by arguing that these institutions have subordinated Judaism to a state project, protected Israeli violence, marginalized Palestinian suffering, and confused Jewish survival with militarized nationalism. Whether one accepts or rejects this charge, it cannot be understood as an ordinary policy disagreement. It is a challenge to the moral architecture of postwar American Jewish public life.

The generational dimension is especially important. Many younger Jews did not experience the founding of Israel, the 1967 war, the Soviet Jewry movement, or the immediate post-Holocaust formation of American Jewish identity in the same way as their parents or grandparents. They encounter Israel through occupation, settlement expansion, Gaza, checkpoints, surveillance, U.S. military aid, viral images of destruction, and the rhetoric of apartheid, genocide, and settler colonialism. They are also shaped by American debates over race, policing, empire, indigeneity, borders, and minority rights. For them, the older emotional grammar of Israel as refuge often competes with the visible reality of Israel as occupying power.

This does not mean that all young Jews are anti-Zionist. They are not. Nor does it mean that older Jews are uniformly Zionist. They are not. But the inherited consensus has weakened because the moral claims that once stabilized it no longer persuade as broadly. Younger Jewish dissenters often see themselves not as abandoning Jewish identity, but as rescuing it from nationalist corruption. They do not merely say that Israel has bad policies. They ask whether Zionism itself requires domination, exclusion, and permanent inequality. That question strikes at the root of the postwar consensus.

Internal Jewish dissent also changes the political terrain outside the Jewish community. Palestinian solidarity movements can point to Jewish allies who reject the charge that criticism of Israel is inherently antisemitic. University debates become more complex when Jewish students stand on both sides. Politicians face pressure not only from pro-Israel donors and advocacy groups, but also from Jewish constituents who demand a ceasefire, sanctions, divestment, or an end to unconditional aid. The existence of Jewish anti-Zionists makes visible a distinction that pro-Israel rhetoric often blurs: Jews are not identical with Israel, Judaism is not identical with Zionism, and Jewish safety is not necessarily identical with Israeli military power.

The move from external criticism to internal dissent is therefore the central fact of the current moment. It transforms the debate from a defensive posture against outsiders into a civil conflict within Jewish identity. New York is where this conflict becomes most visible because the city contains both the guardians of the old consensus and the most visible challengers to it.

### 1.3 Thesis and Scope of the Paper

The thesis of this paper is that Jewish anti-Zionism in New York represents a widening rupture in the postwar American Jewish consensus that fused Jewish identity, Holocaust memory, institutional authority, and support for Israel. This rupture is not reducible to left-wing fashion, youthful rebellion, or foreign influence. It is rooted in older Jewish traditions of anti-Zionism and diasporism, but it has been intensified by contemporary conditions: the Gaza war, the visibility of Palestinian suffering, disillusionment with Israeli politics, the moral language of human rights, the growth of social media, and distrust of institutions that police speech in the name of communal safety.

The paper argues that this rupture has four major dimensions. First, it is theological and moral, because it asks whether Jewish ethics can be reconciled with ethnonational sovereignty, occupation, and collective punishment. Second, it is generational, because younger Jews often experience Israel less as refuge than as a state implicated in violence and domination. Third, it is institutional, because anti-Zionist Jews directly challenge the authority of organizations that claim to represent Jewish communal interests. Fourth, it is geopolitical, because Jewish anti-Zionism weakens the symbolic foundation of U.S. support for Israel by undermining the claim that American Jewish opinion is unified behind Israeli policy.

The scope of the paper is American Jewish anti-Zionism with a specific focus on New York as a symbolic and institutional center. It will not attempt a complete history of Zionism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or global Jewish politics. Instead, it will examine the present rupture as a conflict over representation, memory, theology, ethics, and power. The paper will consider mainstream Zionist institutions, progressive Jewish anti-Zionist organizations, anti-occupation movements, religious anti-Zionists, student activists, Palestinian solidarity coalitions, and dissident journalists such as Max Blumenthal. These actors do not all share the same worldview. Some oppose Zionism on theological grounds, some on human rights grounds, some on anti-imperial grounds, and some through a diasporic Jewish ethic. Their convergence lies in their refusal to accept that Jewish identity must be organized around loyalty to the Israeli state.

The paper will also maintain a necessary distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism while refusing simplistic formulas. Real antisemitism exists and has often exploited criticism of Israel as a vehicle for hatred of Jews. At the same time, accusations of antisemitism have often been used to discipline legitimate criticism of Zionism, Israeli policy, and U.S. support for Israel.

A serious analysis must hold both truths at once. It must reject hatred of Jews while also rejecting the use of Jewish vulnerability as a shield for state violence.

This distinction is especially important because the current rupture is not a conflict between Jews and non-Jews, but among Jews themselves. Jewish anti-Zionists do not merely ask the world to reconsider Israel. They ask Jews to reconsider what Jewishness means after Zionism. Their challenge is not only political but civilizational: can diaspora Judaism recover an identity grounded in ethics, covenant, memory, learning, and solidarity rather than state power? Can Jewish safety be imagined without domination over Palestinians? Can Holocaust memory be detached from permanent militarization? Can American Jewish life survive the collapse of the Zionist monopoly over public legitimacy?

These questions define the paper's central inquiry. New York is the theater, but the stakes are global. If the old consensus breaks in New York, it breaks at the symbolic center of American Jewish power. The anti-Zionist rupture therefore deserves to be studied not as a fringe disturbance, but as a major transformation in Jewish political consciousness and in the future of American debate over Israel and Palestine.

**2. Zionism, Judaism, and the Postwar American Consensus**

The postwar American Jewish consensus did not arise automatically, and it was never simply a reflection of ancient Jewish belief. It was a modern political, institutional, theological, and emotional construction formed under the pressure of catastrophe. Before the Second World War, Jewish opinion about Zionism was divided. Some Jews supported the return to Zion as a national project, some understood it religiously, some opposed it as premature or dangerous, some preferred socialist diasporism, some sought assimilation into liberal states, and some regarded Jewish peoplehood as primarily covenantal rather than territorial. The Holocaust, the founding of Israel, the Cold War, the 1967 war, Soviet Jewry activism, and the rise of American Jewish prosperity changed the balance. Over time, support for Israel became one of the central public signs of organized American Jewish identity.

This consensus was powerful because it joined several forces that were individually strong but collectively overwhelming. It linked memory of Jewish vulnerability to the need for Jewish sovereignty. It linked religious language to modern nationalism. It linked American democratic self-understanding to Israeli democratic self-presentation. It linked philanthropy, lobbying, education, synagogue life, and family memory into a common story. In that story, Israel was not merely another foreign state. It was the refuge that arrived after Auschwitz, the proof that Jews would never again be defenseless, the place where Jewish history reentered political agency, and the moral center around which diaspora loyalty could organize itself.

Yet this consensus contained unresolved contradictions from the beginning. Judaism is older than Zionism. Jewish peoplehood is older than the State of Israel. Diaspora Jewish life did not begin as a failed waiting room for sovereignty, and many Jews across centuries built religious, intellectual, communal, and ethical worlds outside political control of the land. The postwar American consensus often compressed this complexity into a simplified civil religion: Judaism culminates in Israel, Jewish memory requires Zionism, and Jewish safety depends on Israeli power. That compression produced institutional strength, but it also created the conditions for the current revolt. When Jews who do not accept this fusion speak publicly, they are not rejecting Jewish history. They are contesting one modern interpretation of it.

The central issue is therefore not whether Jews have historical, religious, or emotional ties to the land of Israel. Those ties are real and deep. The issue is whether those ties require support for a modern ethnonational state, whether Jewish self-determination can be separated from Palestinian dispossession, and whether diaspora Jewish institutions have the right to define loyalty to Israel as loyalty to Judaism itself. The postwar consensus answered these questions in one way. The new Jewish anti-Zionist movement answers them differently.

The consensus was also shaped by American conditions. American Jews became increasingly integrated into universities, professions, politics, media, philanthropy, and suburban life. Israel became a way to preserve collective Jewish identity in a society where assimilation was both possible and tempting. For many families, Israel trips, Hebrew school, synagogue fundraisers, Holocaust education, summer camps, youth groups, and communal commemorations formed a single moral pedagogy. Jewishness was taught through memory of persecution and admiration for Jewish survival, and Israel stood at the center of that lesson. The Israeli soldier, the kibbutz pioneer, the Holocaust survivor, and the American Jewish donor became linked images in a shared narrative of resilience.

This narrative did not require all American Jews to be religiously observant. In fact, Israel often functioned as a substitute sacred center for increasingly secular Jews. A Jew who rarely attended synagogue could still feel bound to Jewish destiny through support for Israel. A family that did not keep kosher could still donate to Israeli causes, display concern during wars, or send children on Israel programs. In this way, Zionism helped organize Jewish continuity in a secularizing diaspora. It became a civic religion of Jewish survival.

But civic religions can fracture when their symbols no longer persuade. For a growing number of Jews, especially those shaped by images of occupation, bombardment, checkpoints, settlements, siege, and Palestinian death, Israel no longer functions as the unquestioned emblem of Jewish moral renewal. It appears instead as a state exercising domination over another people. The inherited consensus tells them to see refuge; their eyes tell them to see power. The inherited consensus tells them to see Jewish safety; they see Palestinian insecurity.

The inherited consensus tells them to remember Jewish suffering; they ask whether memory is being used to excuse another people's suffering.

That is the fundamental crisis of the postwar American consensus. It successfully made Israel central to American Jewish identity, but it also made American Jewish identity vulnerable to Israel's moral and political trajectory. When Israel's actions are experienced as intolerable, the identity structure built around Israel becomes unstable. Jewish anti-Zionism arises at that point of instability. It is a refusal to let Jewishness remain captive to a state project that dissenters believe has betrayed Jewish ethics.

**2.1 The Fusion of Jewish Memory and Israeli Statehood**

The fusion of Jewish memory and Israeli statehood is the emotional core of postwar Zionist identity. It rests on the claim that Jewish history, culminating in the Holocaust, revealed the fatal danger of statelessness. In this interpretation, the lesson of Jewish suffering is that Jews must possess sovereign power, military capacity, border control, intelligence services, and the right to act decisively in defense of Jewish life. Israel becomes not merely a state founded in 1948, but the answer to centuries of exile, pogrom, humiliation, and extermination. The slogan "never again" becomes politically inseparable from Jewish sovereignty.

This fusion was not irrational. It emerged from real trauma. European Jewish civilization was destroyed. Many survivors had nowhere to go. Liberal societies had failed to protect Jews. Immigration restrictions had trapped refugees. Churches, universities, governments, and ordinary citizens had often been passive, complicit, or hostile. In that context, the argument for Jewish self-defense carried immense force. The State of Israel could be imagined as the historical correction to Jewish powerlessness.

For American Jews, this emotional structure became especially powerful after the Holocaust entered public memory more fully in the decades after the war. Israel came to function as the living counter-image to the death camps. Where European Jews had been trapped, Israeli Jews were armed. Where Jews had been dependent on hostile governments, Israel would act independently. Where Jewish bodies had been rendered disposable, Israeli sovereignty promised agency. In communal education, this contrast became a central moral lesson. The Holocaust and Israel were often taught as sequential chapters: catastrophe followed by rebirth.

The danger of this fusion is that it can convert a historical lesson into an unquestionable political theology. If Israel is the answer to Auschwitz, then criticism of Israel may be heard not as criticism of a state but as indifference to Jewish survival. If Jewish sovereignty is treated as the only guarantee against extermination, then Palestinian resistance can be interpreted not as anti-colonial or national struggle but as a continuation of ancient hatred. If Holocaust memory is

attached too tightly to Israeli state legitimacy, then the suffering of Palestinians may be morally displaced or made invisible.

This does not mean Holocaust memory is false or manipulative in itself. The catastrophe was real, and its memory is indispensable. The problem arises when memory is organized so narrowly around Jewish power that it loses its universal ethical force. The Holocaust can teach many lessons: the danger of racism, the fragility of minorities, the cruelty of bureaucratic dehumanization, the failure of bystanders, the corruption of law, and the horror of state violence. The postwar Zionist consensus emphasized one lesson above all: Jews must never again be defenseless. Jewish anti-Zionists often emphasize another: no people should be dehumanized, dispossessed, besieged, or destroyed in the name of another people's trauma.

This difference in emphasis produces a profound moral conflict. For defenders of the consensus, anti-Zionist Jews appear to have forgotten the vulnerability of Jewish life. For anti-Zionist Jews, defenders of the consensus appear to have universalized Jewish suffering only when Jews are victims and particularized it when Palestinians are victims. The dispute is not over whether the Holocaust matters. It is over how Holocaust memory should govern Jewish political ethics.

Israeli statehood also fused with older religious memory. The land of Israel is not an arbitrary territory in Jewish consciousness. It is embedded in scripture, liturgy, longing, pilgrimage, exile, messianic expectation, and communal imagination. Prayers for Zion, mourning for Jerusalem, Passover language, biblical geography, rabbinic interpretation, and centuries of yearning cannot be dismissed as modern propaganda. Zionism drew power from these deep reservoirs.

Yet modern political Zionism transformed religious longing into national sovereignty. This transformation was revolutionary. The sacred geography of Jewish memory became the territory of a modern state. Biblical language entered diplomacy, war, settlement, education, and public legitimacy. A religious-symbolic homeland became a political homeland. For many Jews, this was fulfillment. For others, it was a dangerous confusion of covenant and nationalism.

The postwar consensus often avoided the full difficulty of this transformation. It presented Israel as both ancient and modern, both refuge and democracy, both biblical inheritance and liberal state, both Jewish destiny and Western ally. These layers did not always cohere. A state cannot be only a symbol. It has borders, police, prisons, armies, demographic policies, property laws, enemies, minorities, and occupied subjects. Once the sacred symbol becomes a state, it must be judged as a state. Jewish anti-Zionism begins from that insistence.

The fusion of memory and statehood therefore gave Israel extraordinary moral power in American Jewish life, but it also created extraordinary moral risk. If the state acts unjustly, then the memory attached to it becomes implicated. If the state demands loyalty, then memory becomes disciplinary. If the state claims to represent Jews everywhere, then Jews everywhere

are drawn into its legitimacy crisis. The current rupture shows that many Jews no longer accept this fusion as inevitable. They seek to remember Jewish suffering without sanctifying Israeli power.

**2.2 Holocaust Trauma, Communal Discipline, and Political Loyalty**

Holocaust trauma shaped American Jewish identity not only through grief but through discipline. It created a communal atmosphere in which unity was often treated as survival. Division appeared dangerous because Jewish weakness had been fatal. Public criticism of Jewish institutions, Jewish leaders, or Israel could be perceived as giving ammunition to enemies. The moral pressure to remain united became a political force.

This discipline was understandable in its origins. A traumatized people often seeks cohesion. Survivors carried memories that were beyond ordinary speech. Families bore absences, silences, nightmares, and inherited fear. Postwar Jewish institutions had to build schools, memorials, archives, synagogues, charities, defense organizations, and political networks in a world where antisemitism had not disappeared. Under such conditions, vigilance seemed necessary. Suspicion of enemies seemed prudent. Public solidarity seemed protective.

But discipline can outlive its original necessity and become an instrument of control. In American Jewish life, support for Israel increasingly became one of the measures of communal loyalty. Jews could disagree about many things: theology, ritual observance, party politics, intermarriage, capitalism, socialism, denominational affiliation, and American domestic policy. But Israel often occupied a protected category. Criticism could be allowed if it remained within accepted boundaries: concern for Israel's democratic character, opposition to particular settlements, criticism of specific prime ministers, or appeals to a two-state solution. More fundamental opposition to Zionism itself was usually treated as illegitimate.

The charge of betrayal has been central to this discipline. Anti-Zionist Jews are often accused of abandoning their people, aiding antisemites, endangering Israeli Jews, exploiting Jewish identity for social approval, or speaking from ignorance of Jewish history. Such accusations have real emotional force because they draw on the deepest wounds of Jewish vulnerability. No Jew wants to be told that his or her words may endanger other Jews. No Jew wants to be placed outside the moral community of Jewish memory.

Yet this discipline can become morally abusive when it forbids Jews to speak honestly about what they see. If a Jewish person believes that Israel is committing grave injustice, then silence cannot be demanded in the name of loyalty. If Jewish institutions defend policies that produce Palestinian suffering, then dissent may become an ethical obligation rather than a betrayal. The question becomes: loyalty to what? To a state, to a people, to a memory, to a tradition, to justice, to truth, or to institutional authority?

The postwar consensus often answered by merging these loyalties. To be loyal to Jews meant loyalty to Israel; to be loyal to Israel meant loyalty to Jewish survival; to be loyal to Jewish survival meant supporting the institutions that defended Israel. This chain of equivalence gave communal organizations tremendous power. It allowed them to frame political disagreements as existential threats. It also allowed them to treat dissenters not as participants in Jewish argument but as dangers to Jewish safety.

The effect on public debate has been severe. Many Jews have learned to censor themselves in synagogues, schools, universities, family gatherings, workplaces, and communal events. Some fear professional consequences. Some fear social exclusion. Some fear being called antisemitic despite being Jewish. Some fear hurting parents or grandparents whose identities are deeply tied to Israel. This silence is one reason the current rupture appears sudden. In reality, dissent often existed privately long before it became public.

Holocaust trauma also shaped the way American Jewish institutions interpreted criticism from outside. Because antisemitism is real, and because anti-Jewish movements have often used political language to disguise hatred, vigilance is necessary. But vigilance can become indiscriminate. When criticism of Israel is too quickly equated with antisemitism, the category of antisemitism is inflated and weakened. Genuine hatred of Jews becomes harder to identify because the term is used to police political disagreement. Jewish anti-Zionists often argue that this inflation harms Jews as well as Palestinians because it confuses communal safety with ideological conformity.

Political loyalty to Israel also became intertwined with American loyalty. During the Cold War and after, Israel was increasingly presented as a democratic ally, a Western outpost, a strategic partner, and a moral companion to the United States. American Jews could support Israel not only as Jews but as Americans. This dual loyalty was usually framed positively: support for Israel served American values and Jewish survival simultaneously. But critics argue that it also tied Jewish communal leadership to U.S. imperial policy, military aid, and bipartisan foreign-policy consensus.

The policing of loyalty therefore operated in two directions. Jews were encouraged to support Israel as Jews and as Americans. Criticism of Israel could be portrayed as disloyal to Jewish survival and as hostile to American strategic interests. Anti-Zionist Jews disrupt both forms of discipline. They argue that Jewish ethics may require opposition to Israel and that American democracy requires resistance to lobbying structures that protect Israeli impunity.

This is why the current conflict is so intense. It is not merely about Gaza, settlements, or elections. It is about the emotional regime that organized postwar American Jewish identity. Holocaust trauma generated a politics of vigilance, and vigilance generated institutions of

discipline. Those institutions are now being challenged by Jews who claim that memory should liberate moral judgment, not suppress it.

### 2.3 The Rise of Israel-Centered American Jewish Identity

The rise of Israel-centered American Jewish identity was one of the great transformations of twentieth-century Jewish life. In the early American immigrant experience, Jewish identity was organized around many competing centers: Yiddish culture, labor movements, religious observance, neighborhood life, mutual aid, education, anti-fascism, socialism, liberalism, family networks, and the struggle for acceptance in American society. Israel was important to many Jews, but it was not always the dominant organizing principle. Over time, however, Israel moved closer to the center of American Jewish institutional life.

Several developments accelerated this shift. The founding of Israel created a living political symbol. The Holocaust gave that symbol moral urgency. The 1967 war transformed Israel's image from vulnerable refuge into heroic military power. The Soviet Jewry movement connected Jewish activism to rescue and national solidarity. American Jewish prosperity created donor networks capable of sustaining major institutions. Synagogues, federations, advocacy groups, schools, summer camps, youth trips, and philanthropic campaigns increasingly treated Israel as a central pillar of Jewish continuity.

Israel-centered identity offered a solution to a problem that haunted American Jewish life: how to remain Jewish in a society where Jews could assimilate successfully. In earlier periods, antisemitism had enforced boundaries from outside. As Jews gained access to universities, professions, suburbs, politics, and mainstream culture, Jewish identity became more voluntary. Voluntary identity needs symbols, rituals, institutions, and emotional anchors. Israel provided all of these. It gave secular Jews a collective cause, religious Jews a sacred geography, liberal Jews a democracy to defend, conservative Jews a military ally, philanthropists a destination for generosity, and educators a narrative of survival.

This identity was reproduced through institutions. Children learned about Israel in Hebrew school. Teenagers joined youth programs. College students encountered Hillel, Birthright, Israel advocacy, and campus debates. Synagogues prayed for Israel. Federations raised money for Israel. Museums linked Holocaust memory to Jewish resilience. Political organizations defended U.S.-Israel relations. Families told stories of Israel's wars, dangers, and miracles. In countless ways, Israel became woven into the texture of American Jewish belonging.

The success of this project made its assumptions appear natural. Many American Jews came to experience attachment to Israel not as a political position but as part of being Jewish. Even Jews who disliked Israeli governments often retained emotional loyalty to Israel as a symbol. Criticism could be framed as care. Reform, Conservative, and many secular institutions developed liberal

Zionist languages that allowed American Jews to support Israel while opposing occupation, religious coercion, or right-wing Israeli politics. This liberal Zionist position became the bridge between American Jewish liberal values and Israeli state loyalty.

But the bridge has weakened. The longer occupation continued, the harder it became to describe Israel as merely flawed but fundamentally liberal. The expansion of settlements, the repeated wars in Gaza, the entrenchment of unequal rights, the rise of openly ethnonationalist Israeli politics, and the failure of the peace process damaged the plausibility of liberal Zionism. Many younger Jews no longer see a temporary deviation from democratic ideals. They see a structure of domination. For them, the problem is not only what Israel does but what Zionism requires.

The rise of Israel-centered identity also had the unintended effect of narrowing Jewish imagination. If Israel is made central to Jewishness, then other forms of Jewish life can appear secondary. Diaspora traditions, Yiddish radicalism, religious anti-nationalism, diasporic ethics, local communal life, and universalist Jewish politics may be neglected or treated as incomplete. Jewish anti-Zionists often respond by recovering these suppressed alternatives. They argue that Jewish history contains rich traditions of life without sovereignty, solidarity with the oppressed, suspicion of kingship, prophetic justice, exile as vocation, and covenant beyond nation-state power.

This recovery is threatening to Israel-centered institutions because it breaks the monopoly of meaning. If Jewishness can flourish without Zionism, then Israel loses its status as the necessary center of Jewish continuity. If Jewish safety can be imagined through solidarity, rights, pluralism, and diaspora resilience rather than military supremacy, then the moral logic of the consensus weakens. If Jewish memory can be mobilized for Palestinian liberation rather than Israeli defense, then the political direction of communal identity changes.

New York magnifies this struggle because it embodies both sides. It is a city where Israel-centered Jewish institutions are powerful, but also a city where diaspora Jewish life has never been reducible to Zionism. The Jewish New York of labor history, immigrant neighborhoods, Yiddish culture, radical politics, religious pluralism, publishing, comedy, intellectual dissent, and street protest remains alive beneath the institutional consensus. Anti-Zionist Jews draw from that older diasporic energy, whether consciously or not. They are not only rejecting Israel-centered identity; they are reviving other ways of being Jewish in public.

The rise of Israel-centered American Jewish identity was historically successful because it answered real needs: memory, safety, continuity, pride, and belonging. Its crisis has emerged because the same structure now confronts realities it cannot easily absorb. Palestinian suffering cannot be indefinitely excluded from Jewish moral consciousness. Israeli state violence cannot

be endlessly separated from Jewish institutional defense. Younger Jews cannot be compelled forever by narratives that do not match what they see. The consensus that once unified American Jewish life now divides it.

The future of American Jewish identity will depend on whether this Israel-centered model can adapt, fragment, or be replaced. Some Jews will remain committed Zionists. Some will seek a reformed liberal Zionism. Some will become post-Zionists. Some will become explicit anti-Zionists. Some will retreat from the question entirely. But the era in which organized American Jewish life could presume Israel as the uncontested center is ending. The rise of Jewish anti-Zionism in New York is one of the clearest signs that this transformation has already begun.

**3. The Earlier Traditions of Jewish Anti-Zionism**

Jewish anti-Zionism did not begin with Gaza, the campus movements, the American left, or contemporary critiques of Israeli policy. It is older than the State of Israel and older than the present alignment between American Jewish institutions and Zionism. Before Zionism became the dominant public language of Jewish political identity in the United States, Jews argued intensely among themselves about nationalism, exile, sovereignty, messianism, assimilation, socialism, religion, and the future of Jewish peoplehood. Zionism was one answer to the crisis of Jewish modernity, but it was never the only answer. To understand the current Jewish anti-Zionist rupture in New York, it is necessary to recover these earlier traditions, because contemporary dissent is not an invention from outside Jewish life. It draws from long-standing Jewish arguments about power, land, peoplehood, ethics, and redemption.

The older traditions of Jewish anti-Zionism were not uniform. Some were religious and opposed the creation of a Jewish state before divine redemption. Some were socialist and argued that Jewish liberation should occur through class struggle and democratic rights where Jews already lived. Some were diasporist and saw Jewish life outside the land of Israel not as failure but as a legitimate civilization. Some were assimilationist and feared that Zionism would undermine Jewish citizenship in liberal states. Some were universalist and rejected nationalism itself as spiritually or politically dangerous. Others were practical rather than ideological, fearing that Zionism would intensify conflict with Arabs in Palestine or expose Jews elsewhere to accusations of dual loyalty.

These strands differed sharply from one another, but they shared a refusal to identify Jewish destiny with modern state sovereignty. They did not deny Jewish history, Jewish peoplehood, or the emotional power of Zion. Rather, they rejected the claim that the solution to Jewish suffering must be a nation-state organized around Jewish demographic and political dominance in Palestine. For many of these critics, Zionism appeared as a profound break with Jewish

tradition: a secularization of messianic hope, a normalization of Jews into the violent grammar of European nationalism, or a retreat from the ethical vocation of diaspora.

The recovery of earlier Jewish anti-Zionism is important because the postwar consensus often presented anti-Zionism as alien to Jewish experience. In that framing, Zionism stood for Jewish survival and anti-Zionism stood for hostility to Jewish survival. This binary erased the fact that many Jews opposed Zionism precisely because they cared about Jewish survival, Jewish ethics, Jewish religion, or Jewish dignity. They feared that Zionism would not solve the Jewish question but relocate it, militarize it, and bind it to a permanent conflict over land and sovereignty.

The historical irony is that Zionism won many of its arguments through catastrophe. The destruction of European Jewry, the refusal of many countries to admit Jewish refugees, and the need for a place of refuge after the Holocaust gave Zionism a moral and practical urgency that its opponents could not easily answer. Yet the victory of Zionism did not invalidate every anti-Zionist concern. Some religious critics warned against confusing divine promise with state power. Some socialist critics warned that nationalism could divide workers and intensify ethnic conflict. Some diasporists warned that Jewish life would be impoverished if exile were treated only as a defect. Some moral critics warned that Jewish sovereignty in a land inhabited by another people would require coercion, exclusion, or displacement.

The present anti-Zionist movement inherits these unresolved arguments. It often speaks a modern language of human rights, settler colonialism, apartheid, empire, and Palestinian liberation, but beneath that vocabulary are older Jewish questions. Is exile only punishment, or can it be vocation? Is Jewish survival secured by sovereignty, or by justice? Is the land of Israel a sacred promise, a cultural memory, a political project, or all of these at once? Can a people shaped by persecution become safe by wielding state power over another people? What happens when a messianic symbol becomes a military bureaucracy?

The current rupture in New York is therefore not an unprecedented rebellion against Jewish tradition. It is a return of suppressed Jewish arguments. The older traditions of anti-Zionism show that Jewish identity has always contained alternatives to state-centered nationalism. They also show that the conflict over Zionism has never been merely geopolitical. It is theological, ethical, civilizational, and internal to Jewish modernity itself.

### 3.1 Religious Anti-Zionism Before and After 1948

Religious Jewish anti-Zionism is among the oldest and most persistent forms of opposition to Zionism. Its central claim is that Jewish return, sovereignty, and redemption cannot be forced by human political action. In this view, exile is not merely a political condition to be overcome by nationalist organization. It is bound to divine judgment, covenantal history, repentance, and messianic expectation. The restoration of Jewish sovereignty must come through divine

redemption, not through secular nationalism, diplomacy, colonization, military force, or statecraft.

This position does not deny the sacredness of the land of Israel. On the contrary, it often takes that sacredness more seriously than secular Zionism does. For religious anti-Zionists, the land is not simply territory available for modern national possession. It is covenantal land, bound to divine law and messianic time. To seize sovereignty prematurely may therefore represent not fulfillment but rebellion. The issue is not whether Zion matters. The issue is whether modern political Zionism has the authority to transform sacred longing into state power.

Traditional religious objections to Zionism often drew on the belief that Jews were not permitted to force the end of exile by mass political action. Exile was to be endured, sanctified, and spiritually interpreted until redemption came from God. This did not mean passivity in every sense. Jewish communities could build institutions, study Torah, support one another, preserve memory, and pray for return. But they could not simply declare redemption through nationalist will. To do so was to confuse divine promise with human ambition.

This critique became especially sharp because early Zionism was often secular, socialist, nationalist, or anti-clerical. Many of its leaders did not seek a Torah-ruled society but a modern Jewish nation. They drew from European nationalism, romantic peoplehood, labor settlement, political diplomacy, and military self-defense. To religious traditionalists, this looked like a profanation of Jewish hope. The language of Zion was being used, but the spiritual content had been transformed. Redemption had become politics. Covenant had become nationality. The messianic horizon had become a state program.

After 1948, religious anti-Zionism faced a new reality. The State of Israel existed. It had absorbed refugees, fought wars, built institutions, revived Hebrew as a public language, and become central to world Jewish life. Some religious Jews who had opposed Zionism made practical accommodations. Others became religious Zionists and interpreted the state as part of divine providence. Still others maintained principled opposition, arguing that the state's existence did not prove its theological legitimacy.

Among Haredi and Hasidic anti-Zionist currents, the State of Israel could be viewed as spiritually dangerous even when it protected Jewish bodies. A state that claimed to speak in the name of Jews while violating Torah principles, relying on secular nationalism, or ruling over others through force could not be treated as the fulfillment of Jewish destiny. Some communities rejected Israeli symbols, refused participation in state ceremonies, opposed military service, or denied that the state had religious legitimacy. Their critique was not liberal or leftist. It was rooted in an older religious grammar.

This distinction matters because contemporary discussions often assume that opposition to Zionism comes only from secular radicals or progressive activists. Religious anti-Zionism shows otherwise. One may oppose Zionism from the right, from the left, from tradition, from universalism, from pacifism, from socialism, or from strict theological obedience. Anti-Zionism is not a single ideology. It is a field of objections to the fusion of Jewish identity with modern sovereignty.

Religious anti-Zionism also exposes a tension inside Zionism itself. Zionism needed biblical memory and sacred geography to mobilize Jewish attachment, but much Zionism also sought to normalize Jews as a modern nation among nations. This combination creates an unstable mixture. If Israel is merely a modern state, then it must be judged by ordinary political and ethical standards. If Israel is the embodiment of sacred promise, then criticism becomes sacrilege. Religious anti-Zionists often reject this ambiguity. They refuse to allow secular state power to borrow sacred legitimacy while acting through the instruments of modern nationalism.

The religious critique after 1948 also raises the problem of representation. Does the State of Israel speak for Jews as Jews, or only for its citizens? Many religious anti-Zionists reject the claim that a secular state can represent the Jewish people in a theological sense. This has direct relevance to the modern diaspora debate. If Israel claims to act in the name of all Jews, then all Jews are implicated in its actions. Anti-Zionist Jews resist that implication. Religious anti-Zionists have resisted it for generations, not because they deny Jewish peoplehood, but because they deny the state's authority to possess it.

The Gaza war and the hardening of Israeli nationalism have given renewed visibility to religious anti-Zionist arguments, though these arguments remain distinct from progressive Jewish activism. Some ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionists oppose Israel not primarily because of Palestinian human rights language, but because the state represents a theological error. Yet their existence complicates the public narrative. They demonstrate that one can be deeply Jewish, traditionally observant, and opposed to Zionism. This directly challenges the claim that anti-Zionism is inherently a rejection of Jewish identity.

Religious anti-Zionism also forces a deeper question: what is Jewish power for? If power is exercised without holiness, justice, humility, or obedience to divine law, can it still be considered Jewish in a meaningful sense? If sovereignty produces pride, domination, militarization, and dependence on empire, has it redeemed exile or merely reproduced the sins of the nations? These questions are not easily absorbed by modern political categories, but they remain central to the Jewish anti-Zionist inheritance.

### 3.2 Socialist, Bundist, and Diasporist Alternatives

Not all Jewish anti-Zionism was religious. Some of the most important opposition to Zionism came from secular Jewish socialist, Bundist, and diasporist traditions. These movements arose from the conditions of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, where Jews faced poverty, antisemitism, state repression, linguistic distinctiveness, labor exploitation, and political marginalization. For many Jewish radicals, the answer was not emigration to Palestine but organized struggle where Jews already lived. Jewish liberation would come through socialism, democratic rights, cultural autonomy, labor organizing, and solidarity with other oppressed peoples.

The Bundist tradition is especially important because it offered a direct alternative to Zionist nationalism. It affirmed Jewish peoplehood and Jewish culture, especially Yiddish culture, but rejected the idea that Jews needed territorial sovereignty in Palestine to live collectively and with dignity. Its principle was often summarized by the idea of "hereness": Jews should fight for rights, justice, and cultural life in the places where they actually lived. Exile was not simply a problem to be solved by departure. Diaspora was a lived civilization.

This diasporic orientation challenged Zionism at its root. Zionism often described diaspora as abnormal, unsafe, incomplete, or dependent. The Bundist and diasporist answer was that diaspora could be politically organized and culturally creative. Jews did not need to become a normal nation-state in order to be a people. They could be a transnational people with language, memory, institutions, ethics, and political commitments rooted in local life. They could demand equality without abandoning the societies in which they lived.

Socialist Jewish anti-Zionism also rejected the class implications of nationalism. Many Jewish socialists believed that nationalism divided workers and redirected anger away from capitalist and state oppression. Jewish workers, Polish workers, Russian workers, German workers, Arab workers, and others had common interests against ruling elites. Zionism, from this perspective, risked transforming Jewish suffering into a separate nationalist project rather than a shared revolutionary struggle. It answered antisemitism by creating a Jewish national project, but socialists wanted to abolish the conditions that produced persecution, exploitation, and hierarchy.

This critique had particular force because Zionism emerged from the same European crisis that produced other national movements. For some Jewish radicals, Zionism appeared as an imitation of the very nationalisms that had endangered Jews. It accepted the premise that a people without a state was incomplete. It sought flags, territory, labor, army, diplomacy, and demographic consolidation. To anti-nationalist Jews, this was not liberation but surrender to the political logic of the age.

Diasporism also preserved forms of Jewish culture that Zionism sometimes marginalized. Yiddish, in particular, became a battlefield. Zionism elevated Hebrew as the language of national rebirth, while many diasporic Jews lived, wrote, argued, sang, organized, and dreamed in Yiddish. The choice between Hebrew and Yiddish was not merely linguistic. It represented different futures: return and national revival in the land, or cultural autonomy and working-class life in the diaspora. The victory of Hebrew in Zionist consciousness was part of the broader triumph of Israel-centered Jewish identity, but Yiddish radicalism left a deep inheritance of anti-Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish imagination.

The destruction of European Jewry devastated the social world that had sustained Bundism and much of secular diasporism. This is one reason Zionism gained moral force after the war. The argument for "hereness" seemed brutally defeated where "here" had become a killing ground. Yet the moral defeat of European civilization did not prove that diaspora as such was impossible. It proved that Jews were vulnerable in a Europe overcome by fascism, racism, war, collaboration, and indifference. The postwar elevation of Zionism often treated the Holocaust as a refutation of diasporism, but the conclusion was not inevitable. Some survivors and descendants continued to believe that the answer to fascism should be universal justice, anti-racism, socialism, and protection of minorities everywhere, not the creation of a militarized ethnonational state.

The relevance of these traditions to New York is profound. New York Jewish life was shaped by immigrants, unions, Yiddish culture, socialist politics, secular intellectuals, garment workers, labor newspapers, mutual aid societies, and radical argument. The city's Jewish past was never simply Zionist. It contained strong diasporic and left-wing currents that imagined Jewish dignity through solidarity, labor, education, culture, and political struggle in America. Contemporary Jewish anti-Zionism in New York, even when it does not explicitly cite Bundism, often revives its spirit: Jewish life here, Jewish ethics here, Jewish responsibility here, and solidarity with the oppressed here.

Modern Jewish anti-Zionist groups often differ from classical Bundists in language and social base. They may speak more about Palestine, settler colonialism, racial justice, police violence, climate justice, and decolonization than about Yiddish labor culture. Yet they inherit a similar refusal to let Jewish identity be monopolized by a state elsewhere. They insist that Jewish political life in the diaspora is not derivative. American Jews have responsibilities as Americans, as Jews, and as human beings, and those responsibilities may require opposition to Israel rather than loyalty to it.

Diasporist alternatives also challenge the fear-based logic of Zionism. Zionism often argues that Jews need a state because non-Jewish societies will always eventually betray them. Diasporism does not deny danger, but it refuses to make permanent suspicion the foundation of Jewish

politics. It seeks alliances, rights, pluralism, local rootedness, and shared struggle. It assumes that Jewish safety cannot be separated from the safety of other minorities. If Jews accept domination as the price of safety, they may win power but lose the ethical basis for solidarity.

The socialist and diasporist critique therefore remains alive because the conditions that produced it have not disappeared. Jews still live overwhelmingly outside Israel. They still negotiate minority existence, cultural continuity, assimilation, antisemitism, and solidarity. The question remains whether the diaspora is a temporary failure or a legitimate form of Jewish civilization. Contemporary anti-Zionist Jews answer that diaspora is not a weakness to be overcome by military nationalism. It is a site of Jewish ethical possibility.

**3.3 Theological Objections to Sovereignty Before Redemption**

The theological objection to sovereignty before redemption is one of the deepest critiques of Zionism because it challenges the spiritual timing of the entire project. The issue is not only whether Jews may live in the land of Israel, pray toward Jerusalem, or long for return. The issue is whether Jews may transform that longing into sovereign political power before the messianic redemption ordained by God. For religious anti-Zionists, modern Zionism represents a premature seizure of redemption by human hands.

This objection rests on a different understanding of exile than modern nationalism permits. Nationalism sees exile primarily as political homelessness. A nation without a state is incomplete; therefore, restoration requires territory and sovereignty. Traditional Jewish theology often treats exile as more than homelessness. Exile is spiritual, covenantal, historical, and moral. It is bound to Israel's relationship with God, not merely to Israel's relationship with land. If exile has a divine dimension, then it cannot be solved only by diplomacy, settlement, warfare, or international recognition.

From this perspective, the Zionist state may appear as an attempt to bypass repentance, holiness, and divine redemption. It declares Jewish normalization without resolving the spiritual meaning of Jewish dispersion. It creates political sovereignty without messianic transformation. It replaces waiting with action, prayer with statecraft, and divine kingship with human government. The result, for critics, is not redemption but counterfeit redemption.

The phrase "sovereignty before redemption" captures this anxiety. In Jewish tradition, return is not merely a demographic event. It is associated with restoration, peace, divine presence, righteousness, and the repair of the world. If a Jewish state comes into being through violence, displacement, militarization, secular nationalism, and dependence on great-power politics, religious critics may ask whether this is truly redemption or only another form of exile wearing the garments of power. The people may have returned to the land, but have they returned to God?

This question has become more urgent as Israeli politics has grown more militarized and ethnonationalist. A state that claims Jewish legitimacy while ruling over Palestinians, expanding settlements, bombing densely populated areas, relying on surveillance and walls, and defining citizenship through ethnoreligious hierarchy raises a theological crisis. Can such sovereignty be called Jewish merely because Jews exercise it? Or must Jewish sovereignty be judged by covenantal standards of justice, mercy, humility, and holiness?

Religious Zionists answer these questions differently from religious anti-Zionists. Many religious Zionists interpret the state as part of the unfolding redemption, even if imperfect. Some see military victory, settlement, and Jewish sovereignty over the land as signs of providence. For them, history itself validates the project. The return has happened; therefore, it must have divine meaning. Religious anti-Zionists reject this inference. Success does not prove righteousness. Power does not prove redemption. Survival does not prove holiness. A state can exist and still be theologically illegitimate.

This disagreement reveals a deeper conflict over how Jews should read history. Zionist interpretations often see the founding of Israel and its military victories as evidence of providential return. Anti-Zionist religious interpretations may see the same events as tests, temptations, or dangerous confusions. The question is not simply what happened, but what the events mean within sacred history. That meaning cannot be settled by military facts alone.

The theological objection also has ethical consequences. If redemption has not come, then Jews remain bound to the humility of exile. They must not dominate others in the name of a premature messianic claim. They must not convert longing into coercion. They must not use sacred texts as title deeds for political supremacy. They must not allow the trauma of persecution to justify the oppression of another people. The waiting demanded by exile becomes, in this view, a discipline against idolatry of power.

The danger of idolatry is central. State power can become an idol when it is treated as the guarantor of Jewish life in place of God, Torah, or justice. Military power can become an idol when it promises absolute security. Land can become an idol when possession becomes more important than righteousness. National identity can become an idol when it overrides the ethical demands placed on Israel by its own tradition. Religious anti-Zionism warns that Zionism may have transformed sacred longing into political idolatry.

This critique speaks powerfully to contemporary Jewish anti-Zionism even when secular activists do not use theological language. Many progressive anti-Zionist Jews make a structurally similar argument: Jewish institutions have worshiped state power, confused safety with domination, and sacrificed universal justice to national loyalty. The vocabulary differs, but the concern

overlaps. Both religious and secular critics ask whether Jewish identity has been subordinated to an idol of sovereignty.

The question of redemption also complicates the meaning of "return." A physical return to land may occur without moral return. A people may possess territory but lose its ethical direction. A state may speak Hebrew, fly Jewish symbols, observe Jewish holidays, and claim biblical legitimacy, yet still fail the prophetic demand for justice. Religious anti-Zionism therefore refuses to equate Jewish symbols with Jewish righteousness. It insists that the true test of Jewish life is not sovereignty itself but faithfulness.

For diaspora Jews, this objection opens another possibility. If redemption has not arrived through the state, then diaspora life remains spiritually meaningful. Exile is not simply erased by Israel's existence. Jews outside Israel are not incomplete Jews awaiting relocation or political absorption into Israeli destiny. They remain part of Jewish covenantal history. Their task may be to preserve Torah, ethics, memory, argument, and solidarity without surrendering to nationalist certainty.

This is why theological anti-Zionism remains relevant to the New York rupture. New York's anti-Zionist Jews may be secular, religious, or somewhere between, but many are asking whether Jewish life must be organized around Israeli sovereignty. The older theological answer says no. Jewish life is not redeemed by a state. Jewish identity is not completed by an army. Jewish memory is not fulfilled by domination. If redemption is real, it cannot be reduced to flags, borders, weapons, and demographic control.

The objection to sovereignty before redemption therefore preserves a radical Jewish warning: the deepest danger is not only Jewish powerlessness, but Jewish power without holiness. Zionism arose as an answer to Jewish vulnerability. Religious anti-Zionism asks whether that answer has created another exile, this time an exile into power itself.

**4. New York as the Theater of Jewish Institutional Power**

New York is not simply a location where Jewish arguments over Zionism happen. It is one of the principal stages on which Jewish institutional authority is performed, contested, defended, and broken. The city concentrates many of the social forces that have shaped American Jewish life: synagogues, federations, foundations, universities, publishing houses, museums, advocacy organizations, philanthropic networks, political donors, media institutions, cultural elites, student movements, immigrant communities, religious enclaves, and protest coalitions. Because these forces coexist in unusually dense proximity, New York converts internal Jewish disagreement into public spectacle. A conflict that might remain private elsewhere becomes

visible on the street, in newspapers, on campuses, in donor meetings, in synagogue statements, and in electoral politics.

The city therefore provides an unusually clear view of the crisis of the postwar Zionist consensus. The old consensus depended not only on individual belief but on institutional reinforcement. Support for Israel was cultivated through education, philanthropy, synagogue life, memorial culture, youth programming, lobbying, and public rituals of communal solidarity. These institutions did not create Jewish attachment to Israel from nothing. They drew on real memory, real kinship, real fear, real religious symbolism, and real historical trauma. But they also organized those emotions into a political culture in which Israel became central to public Jewish identity.

Jewish anti-Zionism in New York challenges this structure at the point where it is strongest. It does not merely say that Israeli policy is wrong. It says that the institutions claiming to speak for Jewish safety and continuity have bound Jewish identity to a state project that many Jews now regard as morally compromised. This is why the conflict is so intense. Anti-Zionist Jews are not only objecting to events in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, or Israeli politics. They are objecting to a domestic American institutional order that disciplines Jewish speech, distributes legitimacy, rewards loyalty, and punishes dissent.

To describe New York as a theater of Jewish institutional power is not to claim that Jews are unified, secretly coordinated, or uniquely powerful in some conspiratorial sense. Such claims are false and dangerous. The point is more specific and historically grounded: organized American Jewish institutions, like other ethnic, religious, political, and philanthropic institutions, possess structures of authority, money, prestige, access, and narrative control. These structures are visible in New York because the city is a major center of American Jewish organizational life. They are contested because anti-Zionist Jews increasingly refuse to accept that these institutions represent them.

This conflict over representation is central. Mainstream organizations often speak in the name of “the Jewish community,” but there is no single Jewish community with one political will. There are communities, institutions, factions, generations, classes, denominations, ethnic backgrounds, and ideological camps. Zionist institutions may represent many Jews, perhaps even a majority in some contexts, but they do not represent all Jews. Anti-Zionist Jews in New York challenge the language of communal unity by making division visible. Their presence breaks the old public image in which Jewishness and Israel advocacy appeared naturally fused.

The result is a struggle over legitimacy. Who has the authority to define Jewish interest? Who decides when criticism of Israel becomes antisemitism? Who determines whether Jewish institutions should support ceasefire, oppose boycott, defend military aid, invite Israeli officials,

discipline student dissent, or remain silent about Palestinian death? These questions are not abstract. They shape hiring, funding, public reputation, synagogue membership, campus life, journalism, electoral endorsements, and family relationships. New York intensifies them because so many of the relevant institutions are physically and symbolically present there.

In this sense, New York is not only a theater but a pressure chamber. It compresses Jewish memory, American power, Israeli nationalism, Palestinian solidarity, elite philanthropy, street protest, religious authority, and generational revolt into the same urban space. That compression makes the rupture impossible to ignore.

**4.1 Synagogues, Federations, Donors, and Public Legitimacy**

Synagogues and federations have long been among the most important institutions in organized American Jewish life. They provide worship, education, charity, communal infrastructure, leadership, public statements, social belonging, and moral interpretation. They are not merely administrative bodies. They help define what counts as responsible Jewish speech. In the Israel-Palestine debate, this role is especially powerful because the synagogue is both religious space and communal home. A person who dissents from the dominant Israel narrative may feel not only politically isolated but spiritually homeless.

Many synagogues have treated support for Israel as part of ordinary Jewish life. Prayers for Israel, Israeli flags, visiting speakers, Israel trips, memorial events, fundraising appeals, Hebrew education, youth programming, and sermons on Jewish security all reinforce the sense that Israel belongs within the sacred and communal environment. This attachment can be sincere and deeply felt. For many congregants, Israel represents refuge, memory, family, Hebrew language, ancestral longing, and Jewish resilience. Any analysis that reduces this attachment to propaganda fails to understand its emotional depth.

But synagogues can also become sites of exclusion when they allow only one acceptable emotional relationship to Israel. A congregant who opposes Zionism, supports Palestinian liberation, questions Israeli state legitimacy, or condemns Israeli military action may find that there is no place to speak honestly. The result is a hidden exile inside the community. Such Jews may continue attending services but censor themselves, or they may leave organized synagogue life altogether. For younger Jews especially, the silence or defensiveness of religious institutions can become a reason to seek Jewish belonging elsewhere, in anti-Zionist prayer circles, protest groups, independent minyanim, study groups, or interfaith coalitions.

Federations occupy a different but related role. They organize philanthropy and communal priorities. Through funding decisions, partnerships, public messaging, and leadership networks, federations help determine which forms of Jewish life receive institutional support. When federations are strongly attached to Israel advocacy, they shape the boundaries of legitimacy

across schools, cultural institutions, social services, and public events. Even organizations not primarily concerned with Israel may feel pressure to avoid positions that could alienate donors or communal leadership.

Donor power is especially important in New York because philanthropy is one of the city's major languages of influence. Wealthy donors do not need to represent all Jews in order to shape institutional behavior. Their influence operates through boards, grants, endowments, campaign contributions, museum support, university gifts, advocacy funding, and access to political leaders. This is not unique to Jewish institutions; it is a general feature of American civic life. But in the context of Israel, donor influence can reinforce the postwar consensus by making dissent costly.

Public legitimacy often follows money and institutional recognition. A Jewish leader who supports Israel within accepted boundaries may receive invitations, platforms, honors, and communal trust. A Jewish dissident who challenges Zionism at the root may be treated as outside the legitimate community, even when that person is observant, learned, morally serious, or deeply attached to Jewish life. The issue is not simply disagreement. It is the power to decide who is publicly legible as a good Jew.

Anti-Zionist Jews challenge this power by refusing the moral hierarchy embedded in institutional recognition. They do not accept that a federation executive, donor board, rabbinic association, or advocacy organization has the authority to define the limits of Jewish conscience. Their protests often target institutional spaces precisely because these spaces claim public legitimacy. A demonstration inside or outside a major Jewish institution is not only a protest against Israeli policy. It is a protest against the domestic machinery by which Israel is protected from Jewish dissent.

This is why institutional reactions are often severe. From the perspective of mainstream leadership, anti-Zionist Jewish protest can feel like desecration, betrayal, or communal sabotage. It violates the expectation that disagreements should remain internal, polite, and bounded by shared loyalty to Israel. From the perspective of anti-Zionist Jews, however, polite internal disagreement has failed. If institutions defend or excuse mass suffering, then disruption becomes a form of witness. The clash is therefore not merely about tactics. It is about whether communal peace should be preserved when that peace depends on Palestinian invisibility.

Synagogues, federations, and donors also shape language. They influence whether events are described as war, terrorism, defense, occupation, apartheid, massacre, genocide, security, tragedy, or liberation. Language determines moral perception. If Palestinian death is framed primarily as unfortunate collateral damage in a necessary war, the ethical response will differ from a framing that sees Palestinian death as the result of a system of domination. Institutional

language can narrow the moral imagination by defining which griefs are central and which are peripheral.

Anti-Zionist Jews resist this narrowing. They insist that Jewish institutions must name Palestinian suffering without euphemism and without making Jewish grief the only grief that matters. They challenge the assumption that Jewish safety requires institutional loyalty to Israeli force. They argue that Jewish public legitimacy should come not from proximity to power, but from fidelity to truth and justice.

This struggle will not be resolved easily because synagogues, federations, and donors serve real communal needs. Jewish schools need funding. Elder care needs funding. Security needs funding. Cultural life needs funding. Israel-related philanthropy is often embedded in a broader network of communal care. That complexity makes dissent difficult. Anti-Zionist Jews are not simply confronting abstract ideology; they are confronting institutions that also provide belonging, services, memory, and continuity. The rupture is painful because the institutions being challenged are not external enemies. They are home, or at least they once were.

**4.2 Media, Academia, and the Politics of Respectability**

New York's importance also lies in its role as a center of media and academia. Public narratives about Israel, Palestine, antisemitism, Jewish identity, protest, and war are shaped through newspapers, magazines, television, publishing, universities, think tanks, cultural institutions, and elite social networks. These institutions do not operate as a single coordinated machine, and they should not be described as such. They are internally divided, professionally varied, and often contentious. Yet they do participate in the production of respectability: they help determine which arguments are treated as serious, extreme, dangerous, compassionate, hateful, informed, or unspeakable.

For decades, mainstream American discussion of Israel was shaped by boundaries that favored Zionist legitimacy. Criticism of specific Israeli policies could appear in respectable venues, especially when framed as concern for Israel's democratic future or as support for a two-state solution. More fundamental anti-Zionist arguments were often marginalized, treated as radical, naïve, antisemitic, or beyond the pale. Palestinian voices were frequently filtered through security language, terrorism discourse, or humanitarian pity rather than treated as political witnesses to dispossession and occupation.

Academia complicated this picture. Universities provided space for Palestinian scholarship, critical theory, postcolonial analysis, Jewish studies, Middle East studies, and student activism. They also became battlegrounds over speech, donor pressure, administrative discipline, and accusations of antisemitism. New York's universities are especially significant because they sit at the intersection of elite education, Jewish student life, Palestinian activism, donor influence,

media attention, and national politics. A campus protest in New York can become a national controversy within hours.

The politics of respectability operates through subtle and direct mechanisms. Certain speakers are invited; others are disinvited. Certain scholars receive funding; others become controversial. Certain phrases are tolerated; others trigger institutional panic. A student group supporting Israel may be treated as participating in mainstream Jewish life, while a Jewish student group supporting anti-Zionism may be treated as provocative or dangerous. The boundaries are rarely neutral. They reflect power, donor expectations, reputational anxiety, and the inherited moral status of Israel in American public culture.

Media institutions also shape the emotional hierarchy of the conflict. Israeli fear is often individualized and humanized, while Palestinian fear may be aggregated into numbers or geopolitical context. Israeli deaths are narrated through family stories, national mourning, and moral shock. Palestinian deaths are more likely to be discussed through debates over proportionality, military necessity, or disputed responsibility. This asymmetry is not total, and it has weakened in the age of social media, but it remains a major source of anger for anti-Zionist Jews and Palestinian advocates. They argue that mainstream media has often trained audiences to see Israeli life as intimate and Palestinian life as distant.

Jewish anti-Zionist dissent disrupts media narratives because it complicates the expected categories. A Jewish protester calling for Palestinian liberation cannot be easily placed into the old script of Jews versus antisemites. A rabbi opposing Zionism, a Jewish student occupying a campus building, or a Jewish journalist criticizing Israeli propaganda forces media institutions to confront internal Jewish division. Yet media coverage often tries to restore familiar categories by describing such Jews as fringe, extreme, controversial, or unrepresentative. This may be accurate in some statistical contexts, but it can also function to protect the old consensus by denying the depth of the rupture.

Respectability is also policed through tone. Anti-Zionist Jews are often told that they may criticize Israel only if they do so gently, mournfully, privately, and with repeated affirmations of Jewish pain. Anger is treated as illegitimate. Disruption is treated as vulgar. Refusal is treated as immaturity. But movements against entrenched power rarely remain within the emotional limits preferred by the institutions they challenge. The demand for respectable dissent can become a demand for ineffective dissent.

Max Blumenthal and other dissident journalists matter in this context because they reject the tone and boundaries of respectable liberal criticism. Whether one agrees with all of their conclusions or not, their significance lies in their refusal to treat Zionist power as merely a set of policy preferences. They investigate networks, propaganda, lobbying, war narratives, media

discipline, and imperial alignment. This style of journalism is threatening because it names power where respectable discourse often prefers abstraction. It also attracts severe criticism because it challenges institutions that are accustomed to defining the legitimate terms of debate.

Academia faces a related crisis. Universities claim to defend inquiry, but Israel-Palestine repeatedly tests that claim. When students and faculty criticize Zionism, administrations may invoke safety, civility, donor concern, or legal risk. When pro-Israel organizations demand discipline, universities often respond more quickly than they do to other forms of political pressure. Anti-Zionist Jews in academic spaces therefore confront a double problem: they are told that their Jewish identity does not protect them from accusations of antisemitism, and they are told that their dissent may make other Jews unsafe. The result is a conflict over whether safety means protection from bigotry or protection from political challenge.

The politics of respectability is especially visible in the distinction between liberal Zionism and anti-Zionism. Liberal Zionists are often granted respectability because they criticize occupation while preserving Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state. Anti-Zionists are treated as crossing a line because they question the legitimacy of the state form itself. The practical difference may sometimes appear narrow, especially when both oppose settlement expansion or support Palestinian rights, but the symbolic difference is enormous. Liberal Zionism seeks reform of the consensus. Anti-Zionism rejects the consensus.

New York's media and academic environments make this distinction public. A panel, article, protest, commencement speech, faculty letter, or student statement can become a test case for the boundaries of Jewish legitimacy. Anti-Zionist Jews use these spaces to say that respectability itself has become morally suspect when it requires silence about Palestinian suffering. They argue that the polite vocabulary of the old debate served to postpone justice indefinitely. For them, the task is not to become respectable within Zionist discourse, but to break the discourse open.

### 4.3 Why Dissent in New York Has National Meaning

Dissent in New York has national meaning because New York is a symbolic capital, a media amplifier, a donor hub, a political arena, and a Jewish communal center. What happens there is rarely perceived as local only. A Jewish anti-Zionist protest in New York speaks to American Jewish institutions across the country. A campus confrontation in New York influences national debates over antisemitism and free speech. A donor intervention in New York can affect universities, politicians, museums, and advocacy organizations far beyond the city. A rabbinic statement or mass arrest in New York can become an emblem of Jewish division nationally.

The city's national meaning also comes from its historical role in American Jewish identity. New York has long represented the possibility of diaspora flourishing. It is a place where Jews built lives, institutions, neighborhoods, humor, literature, labor movements, religious communities, businesses, universities, and political influence without state sovereignty. This history matters because it contradicts the idea that diaspora is merely weakness. New York itself is evidence that Jewish life outside Israel can be powerful, creative, durable, and public. Anti-Zionist Jews can therefore draw on the city's own history as an argument against Israel-centered identity.

At the same time, New York is central to the American relationship with Israel. Political leaders in the city and state operate in an environment where Jewish voters, donors, institutions, and advocacy groups have significant visibility. National politicians visit New York, raise money there, seek endorsements there, and respond to controversies generated there. This does not mean that Jewish institutions control politics. It means that New York is one of the places where organized interests, including pro-Israel interests, are especially active and visible. Anti-Zionist dissent there therefore affects the public perception of what Jewish voters and Jewish communities want.

The national meaning of New York dissent is intensified by generational change. Younger Jews who see anti-Zionist Jews protesting in New York may feel permission to speak in their own communities. Older Jews who see the same protests may feel alarm that the communal future is slipping away. Non-Jewish activists may see Jewish participation as protection against accusations of antisemitism. Pro-Israel organizations may see it as an urgent threat because it weakens the claim of unified Jewish support for Israel. The same event thus carries different meanings for different audiences, which is precisely why it matters.

Jewish anti-Zionist dissent in New York also has national meaning because it changes the structure of accusation. When opposition to Israeli policy or Zionism comes from outside Jewish life, mainstream institutions can more easily frame it as hostile. When opposition comes from Jews in the most Jewish city in America, that framing becomes harder to sustain. It does not disappear, but it becomes contested. The accusation of antisemitism must now confront the fact that some of the accused are themselves Jewish and claim to act from Jewish ethics. This does not automatically make every anti-Zionist argument valid, but it does force a more complicated public conversation.

The city also gives dissent visual force. Images matter in modern politics. Jewish protesters wearing ritual garments, carrying signs invoking Jewish memory, praying in public for Palestinians, being arrested by police, or confronting major institutions create images that travel. These images undermine the assumption that Jewishness visually belongs only to pro-Israel rallies, Israeli flags, or official commemorations. They make another Jewish public identity

imaginable. In a media culture driven by spectacle, that visual disruption has national consequences.

New York dissent also pressures national Jewish organizations because it occurs near their networks of influence. A protest in a distant city can be ignored as local radicalism. A protest in New York is harder to dismiss because it takes place in the symbolic center of American Jewish public life. It confronts donors, journalists, rabbis, students, politicians, and cultural leaders in their own environment. It says not merely that dissent exists, but that dissent exists at the center.

The national consequences are not limited to Jewish institutions. They affect the broader American left, Democratic Party politics, campus activism, interfaith coalitions, civil liberties debates, and foreign policy discussions. Jewish anti-Zionist activism provides a bridge between Palestinian solidarity movements and sectors of American society that might otherwise fear engaging the issue. It can also provoke backlash, deepen polarization, and intensify institutional efforts to define anti-Zionism as antisemitism. New York becomes the arena in which these national conflicts are rehearsed.

The stakes are especially high because the old postwar consensus depended on the moral authority of Jewish unity. American politicians could support Israel while claiming alignment with the Jewish community. Universities could discipline anti-Israel activism while claiming to protect Jewish students. Media institutions could treat Zionist organizations as representative Jewish voices. Donors could pressure institutions while claiming to defend Jewish safety. Anti-Zionist Jews in New York disrupt each of these moves. They force a distinction between Jewish people and Zionist institutions, between Jewish safety and Israeli impunity, between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, between communal leadership and communal diversity.

This disruption does not mean that anti-Zionist Jews have become the majority. The question of majority status is important but not decisive. Movements can reshape public consciousness before they become numerically dominant. Their significance lies in their ability to make suppressed contradictions visible. Jewish anti-Zionism in New York reveals that the postwar consensus is no longer able to command silence. Once silence breaks, institutional authority must be renegotiated.

The future national meaning of New York dissent will depend on whether the rupture widens or is contained. If mainstream institutions adapt by allowing broader criticism of Israel while preserving Zionist identity, the result may be a reconfigured liberal Zionism. If they respond primarily with discipline, donor pressure, censorship, and accusation, they may drive more Jews toward explicit anti-Zionism. If Israeli politics continues to move toward permanent domination and religious nationalism, the space for compromise may shrink further. In every scenario, New

York will remain a key theater because it is where Jewish institutional power and Jewish dissent confront each other most visibly.

The significance of New York, then, is not merely demographic. It is symbolic, institutional, historical, and strategic. The city represents both the triumph of diaspora Jewish life and the consolidation of Israel-centered communal authority. Jewish anti-Zionist dissent there exposes the contradiction between those two realities. If diaspora Jewish life is rich, powerful, and ethically serious in its own right, then it need not be subordinated to Israeli statehood. If Jewish institutions in New York cannot contain that argument, then the postwar Zionist monopoly over American Jewish identity is already ending.

**5. The New Jewish Anti-Zionist Movement**

The new Jewish anti-Zionist movement is not a single organization, ideology, class formation, or religious tendency. It is a convergence of dissident Jewish currents that have become newly visible under the pressure of Israel's war in Gaza, the broader Palestinian struggle, generational disillusionment with institutional Zionism, and the collapse of older liberal narratives about occupation as a temporary deviation. Its members and sympathizers include secular Jews, religious Jews, young activists, rabbis, students, academics, journalists, artists, descendants of Holocaust survivors, children of intermarried families, former liberal Zionists, socialists, anti-imperialists, and Jews whose connection to Judaism has been revived rather than weakened by opposition to Israel. The movement is internally diverse, but it shares a central refusal: Jewish identity must not be equated with loyalty to the Israeli state.

This refusal has transformed the public debate. For decades, the dominant American Jewish institutional order treated Zionism as the common language of Jewish responsibility. Jews could disagree about borders, settlements, prime ministers, peace negotiations, religious pluralism, or the occupation, but the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state often remained protected. The new Jewish anti-Zionist movement crosses that boundary. It does not merely ask Israel to behave better. It asks whether the Zionist project itself has required dispossession, demographic engineering, permanent inequality, and the subordination of Palestinian life to Jewish state sovereignty.

This is why the movement provokes such intense reaction. It challenges not only Israeli policy but the architecture of American Jewish communal identity. If Jews can reject Zionism and remain publicly, seriously, and ethically Jewish, then Zionist institutions lose their monopoly over Jewish representation. If Jewish prayer, ritual, historical memory, and moral language can be used in support of Palestinian liberation, then the old symbolic order is destabilized. If Jewish

grief over antisemitism can coexist with uncompromising opposition to Israeli power, then the postwar fusion of Jewish vulnerability and Israeli state legitimacy begins to break.

The movement is also important because it changes the moral grammar of Palestinian solidarity. Jewish anti-Zionists do not replace Palestinian voices, and they should not be treated as the central witnesses to Palestinian suffering. But their presence alters the American public field. They make it more difficult for pro-Israel institutions to claim that opposition to Zionism is inherently opposition to Jews. They also create a space in which Jewish people can confront Zionism without feeling that they must abandon Jewish memory, Jewish language, or Jewish belonging. In this sense, Jewish anti-Zionism is both a political movement and a reclamation project. It seeks to reclaim Judaism from state nationalism, Jewish ethics from military apologetics, and Jewish memory from the demand for unconditional loyalty.

New York has become one of the movement's most visible theaters because the city contains the institutions it contests and the audiences it seeks to reach. When Jewish anti-Zionists organize there, they act in the symbolic center of American Jewish life. Their protests, vigils, teach-ins, disruptions, letters, rituals, and coalitions become national signals. They announce that Jewish division over Zionism is no longer private, marginal, or easily disciplined. The old institutional language of unity no longer corresponds to visible reality.

The new Jewish anti-Zionist movement should therefore be understood as a historical rupture rather than a passing protest wave. It is rooted in older Jewish anti-Zionist traditions, but its present form is shaped by contemporary conditions: social media images of war, human rights discourse, the language of decolonization, disillusionment with liberal Zionism, student activism, and a broader crisis of trust in elite institutions. It is also shaped by the failure of the peace-process imagination. Many younger Jews did not grow up believing that a two-state solution was imminent. They grew up seeing settlements expand, Gaza besieged, Palestinians occupied, Israeli politics move rightward, and American politicians continue to supply weapons and diplomatic cover. For them, the question is not why they have abandoned the old consensus. The question is why the old consensus survived so long.

**5.1 Jewish Voice for Peace and Explicit Anti-Zionism**

Jewish Voice for Peace occupies a central place in the contemporary Jewish anti-Zionist landscape because it states openly what many older Jewish institutions treated as unsayable: opposition to Zionism can be a Jewish position. This explicitness matters. Many organizations criticize Israeli occupation, defend Palestinian rights, or oppose specific wars while avoiding the deeper question of Zionism itself. Jewish Voice for Peace is significant because it places that question at the center. It argues that the problem is not only a particular government, a

particular military campaign, or a particular settlement policy, but the structure of Jewish supremacy and Palestinian dispossession embedded in the Zionist state project.

The power of explicit anti-Zionism lies in its refusal of euphemism. It does not preserve the comforting distinction that Israel is fundamentally democratic but temporarily corrupted by occupation. It does not treat 1967 as the sole origin of Palestinian suffering. It does not imagine that the conflict can be solved merely by better leadership, more diplomacy, or a return to liberal Zionist ideals. Instead, it asks whether the creation and maintenance of a Jewish state in a land inhabited by Palestinians has always required coercive demographic and political control. That question is the line that separates anti-Zionism from many forms of liberal Zionist criticism.

Jewish Voice for Peace also matters because it uses Jewish language, ritual, and communal forms in anti-Zionist politics. Its public actions often draw on prayer, mourning, liturgy, holiday symbolism, rabbinic testimony, and Jewish ethical vocabulary. This is politically important because it denies Zionist institutions the exclusive right to define Jewish symbolism. A Jewish prayer service for Gaza, a ceasefire protest on a Jewish holiday, or a ritual of mourning for Palestinians unsettles the inherited assumption that Jewish religious identity naturally points toward defense of Israel. It shows that Jewish tradition can be mobilized against Israeli state violence rather than in support of it.

This use of Jewish ritual is also controversial. Critics may regard it as a politicization of sacred forms or as a betrayal of communal solidarity during moments of Jewish fear. Supporters regard it as the opposite: a restoration of sacred forms to ethical seriousness. If prayer does not speak in the presence of mass death, what is it for? If Jewish mourning is reserved only for Jewish victims, what has become of the universal moral demand within Judaism? If ritual cannot interrupt state violence, has it become decoration for power?

Jewish Voice for Peace's explicit anti-Zionism also functions as a shelter for Jews who have felt alienated from mainstream Jewish institutions. Many Jews who oppose Israel's actions experience isolation in synagogues, families, schools, campus organizations, and communal events. They may feel that their moral perception makes them unwelcome in Jewish spaces. An organization that says anti-Zionist Jews are not outside Jewish life but part of it provides an alternative home. This is one reason the movement has grown in visibility. It offers not only analysis but belonging.

The organization's prominence also produces backlash because it threatens the representational claims of mainstream institutions. If a Jewish organization publicly supports Palestinian liberation and opposes Zionism, then the phrase "the Jewish community" becomes unstable. Institutional leaders may respond by arguing that such groups are marginal, unrepresentative, reckless, or harmful. These arguments may persuade some audiences, especially older or more

institutionally connected Jews. But the very need to make them reveals that the old consensus can no longer simply assume itself.

The strongest critique of Jewish Voice for Peace from within the Jewish institutional world is that its anti-Zionism may provide cover for antisemites or weaken Jewish security in a hostile world. This concern should not be dismissed as insincere. Jewish fear is real, and antisemitism does attach itself opportunistically to debates about Israel. Anti-Zionist Jews must therefore exercise discipline in distinguishing critique of Zionism from hostility to Jews as Jews. But the existence of antisemitism cannot be allowed to make Zionism immune from moral judgment. A movement that cannot be criticized because Jews are vulnerable becomes a shield for every action taken in the name of Jewish vulnerability.

Jewish Voice for Peace is most historically significant because it makes Jewish anti-Zionism publicly legible. Earlier generations often treated anti-Zionist Jews as isolated intellectuals, sectarian religious groups, or marginal radicals. The contemporary movement is broader, more organized, more media-aware, and more willing to occupy public space. In New York, this visibility carries particular force. When Jews publicly oppose Zionism in the symbolic capital of American Jewish life, they change the national meaning of Jewish dissent.

**5.2 IfNotNow and the Anti-Occupation Generation**

IfNotNow represents a different but related current: the anti-occupation generation. Its emergence reflects the crisis of younger Jews raised within or near mainstream Jewish institutions who came to reject the silence, evasions, and moral compromises surrounding Israel's rule over Palestinians. Unlike explicitly anti-Zionist formations, anti-occupation movements often began by focusing on ending the occupation rather than rejecting Zionism as such. This distinction matters because it reveals a pathway of radicalization. Many young Jews did not begin as anti-Zionists. They began as Jews who wanted their community to tell the truth about occupation.

The anti-occupation generation was shaped by a contradiction between Jewish ethical education and Jewish institutional politics. Many young Jews were taught to value justice, memory, dissent, civil rights, and the protection of vulnerable people. They were taught that Jewish history imposed moral obligations. Yet when they applied those lessons to Palestinians, they often found that communal institutions became defensive, evasive, or punitive. The lesson seemed to be that Jewish ethics were universal until they reached Israel. This contradiction became intolerable for many.

IfNotNow's importance lies in its challenge to communal silence. It emerged from the recognition that many American Jews knew far more about Jewish fear than Palestinian life. They had been educated in Holocaust memory, Israeli insecurity, antisemitism, and Jewish

resilience, but not in the daily realities of occupation, dispossession, checkpoints, imprisonment, settlement expansion, military law, or Gaza's enclosure. The movement's demand was not only political but pedagogical: American Jewish institutions must stop hiding the occupation from their own children.

This demand exposed the fragility of liberal Zionism. Liberal Zionist institutions often oppose the occupation in principle, but they also protect emotional attachment to Israel as a Jewish state. They condemn extremism, settlements, or right-wing governments while preserving the hope that Israel can remain both Jewish and democratic. Anti-occupation activists pressed the question harder: if occupation is not accidental but persistent, if settlements continue despite decades of criticism, if Palestinian inequality is structural, and if American Jewish institutions continue funding and defending the system, then what exactly is being preserved?

For some activists, the answer was a renewed liberal Zionism committed to ending occupation. For others, the anti-occupation framework became a bridge to anti-Zionism. The movement from one position to the other often followed a moral sequence. First, the young Jew learns that occupation exists. Then the young Jew asks why it has lasted so long. Then the young Jew asks whether it is separable from Zionism. Then the young Jew asks whether a Jewish state can exist without privileging Jews over Palestinians. The final question may lead beyond anti-occupation politics into explicit anti-Zionism.

IfNotNow and similar movements therefore occupy a transitional space in American Jewish politics. They reveal that the younger generation's break with institutional Zionism does not always occur all at once. It may begin with discomfort, then shame, then anger, then organizing, then a rethinking of Jewish identity itself. The anti-occupation generation is important because it shows that the old consensus often breaks from within its own educational system. Jews raised to care about Israel may become critics precisely because they took Jewish moral language seriously.

The movement's generational character is central. Older Jewish institutions often operate from memories of Jewish vulnerability, Israel's early wars, and the emotional centrality of refuge. Younger activists often operate from images of Israeli power, Palestinian suffering, police repression, racial justice movements, and global anti-colonial language. These are not merely different opinions; they are different moral worlds. One generation may see Israel first as survival. Another may see it first as domination. One may hear criticism of Israel as existential threat. Another may hear defense of Israel as moral evasion.

This generational split is intensified by the collapse of institutional trust. Younger Jews are less likely to accept authority simply because it comes from federations, legacy organizations, senior rabbis, donors, or official spokespeople. They are more likely to compare institutional

statements with images and testimonies circulating outside traditional media. They are also more likely to connect Palestine to other struggles against militarism, racism, incarceration, borders, and colonialism. Whether or not older leaders accept these frameworks, they shape the consciousness of a generation.

IfNotNow's style of activism has often emphasized public moral confrontation rather than quiet internal dialogue. This has included protests, direct actions, public mourning, disruptions, and pressure on political leaders. Critics may view such tactics as theatrical or divisive. Supporters regard them as necessary because polite communal conversation failed to stop occupation or war. The tactical dispute again reveals a deeper moral disagreement. Is the primary obligation to preserve communal unity or to interrupt complicity? Is public embarrassment of Jewish institutions a betrayal, or is it a form of accountability?

The anti-occupation generation also changed the language of Jewish fear. Mainstream institutions often ask whether criticism of Israel will make Jews less safe. Younger activists increasingly ask whether defending Israel's domination of Palestinians makes anyone safe. They argue that Jewish safety cannot be built on another people's subjugation, and that the long-term fusion of Jewish identity with Israeli violence may produce greater danger, not less. This argument does not deny antisemitism. It rejects the idea that militarized nationalism is the cure for it.

In New York, the anti-occupation generation has special visibility because young Jews encounter both powerful Jewish institutions and strong Palestinian solidarity networks. They may attend universities where Israel-Palestine is intensely debated, live near major Jewish communal organizations, and participate in protests that receive national attention. Their dissent becomes a sign that the future of American Jewish identity is undecided. If young Jews raised inside the communal world no longer accept its Israel narrative, the consensus cannot reproduce itself automatically.

### 5.3 Student Movements, Street Protests, and Interfaith Coalitions

Student movements, street protests, and interfaith coalitions have given the new Jewish anti-Zionist movement its public force. These spaces allow dissenting Jews to act outside the slow, controlled channels of institutional debate. Instead of waiting for federations, synagogues, universities, or political leaders to authorize speech, activists create their own public legitimacy through visibility, numbers, ritual, disruption, and solidarity. The street becomes an alternative institution. The campus becomes a battlefield over memory and power. The coalition becomes a new form of belonging.

Student movements are especially important because universities concentrate generational conflict. On campuses, Jewish students encounter official Jewish organizations, Palestinian

student groups, Middle East politics, donor pressure, administrative discipline, activist networks, and academic analysis in one space. For many Jewish students, college is the first environment where they hear sustained Palestinian narratives that were absent from childhood education. It may also be the first place where they meet other Jews who question Zionism openly. This can produce a rapid transformation in political consciousness.

The campus struggle is not only about student opinion. It is about institutional authority. Universities are pressured by donors, alumni, politicians, civil rights complaints, media campaigns, faculty factions, and student activists. Israel-Palestine becomes the issue through which universities reveal what kinds of speech they protect and what kinds they fear. Jewish anti-Zionist students complicate administrative claims that restrictions on Palestine activism are simply protections for Jewish safety. When Jewish students themselves participate in Palestine activism, administrations must decide whether Jewish safety means protection from antisemitism or protection from anti-Zionist politics.

This distinction is central. Jewish students can experience real antisemitism on campuses, and no serious movement should dismiss that reality. But Jewish discomfort with criticism of Israel is not the same as antisemitic harassment. Anti-Zionist Jewish students often insist that institutions blur this distinction in order to suppress Palestinian advocacy. Their presence forces universities to confront the diversity of Jewish student experience. Some Jewish students feel unsafe because of anti-Israel activism. Other Jewish students feel unsafe because institutions equate their anti-Zionist commitments with hatred of themselves.

Street protests intensify these conflicts by moving them into public space. Demonstrations in New York carry visual and symbolic power because the city is a media capital and a Jewish communal center. Jewish activists marching for Palestine, blocking entrances, holding signs, chanting in Hebrew or English, wearing ritual garments, or observing Jewish mourning rituals in public create images that travel beyond the event itself. These images announce that Jewish identity is not confined to Zionist representation.

The street also alters the emotional structure of Jewish politics. Institutional Jewish life often privileges controlled speech: panels, sermons, statements, letters, donor meetings, educational programs, and carefully worded resolutions. Street protest privileges urgency. It says that mass death, siege, occupation, and dispossession cannot wait for consensus. It embodies impatience with institutions that have mastered the language of concern while avoiding rupture with power. For anti-Zionist Jews, protest becomes a form of moral emergency.

Interfaith coalitions broaden the movement's reach. Jewish anti-Zionists often work alongside Palestinians, Muslims, Christians, secular leftists, Black activists, antiwar organizers, labor groups, and human rights advocates. These coalitions are politically powerful because they

refuse the isolation of Jewish debate from broader struggles. They locate Palestine within questions of empire, racism, policing, borders, surveillance, and militarism. They also challenge the idea that Jewish safety requires separation from other communities. Instead, they propose solidarity as a form of safety.

Such coalitions are not without tension. Jewish activists must avoid centering themselves in a movement whose primary subjects are Palestinians. They must also navigate moments when anti-Israel anger may slide into language that Jews experience as threatening or historically charged. Palestinian and Muslim activists, meanwhile, may distrust Jewish participants because of the long history of Zionist institutions speaking over or against them. Coalitions require discipline, humility, and moral clarity. They cannot survive on sentiment alone.

Jewish anti-Zionist participation in interfaith coalitions has a distinctive function. It can help separate Judaism from Zionism in public perception. When rabbis, Jewish students, or Jewish organizations stand with Palestinian, Muslim, and Christian partners, they enact the distinction that they argue for intellectually. They show that Jewishness need not be organized around fear of the non-Jewish other. They also challenge Christian Zionist and Islamophobic frameworks that treat Israel as the civilizational outpost of the West against Muslims or Arabs. Jewish anti-Zionists disrupt that alignment by refusing to let Judaism be conscripted into imperial or religious war narratives.

Street and student movements also generate new Jewish rituals. Public mourning for Palestinians, alternative seders, fasts, vigils, memorial readings, prayers for ceasefire, and study sessions on Jewish ethics create forms of Jewish life outside official institutions. These practices matter because movements endure not only through arguments but through rituals of belonging. A Jew alienated from a synagogue because of Zionism may find Jewish community in a protest, a reading group, a prayer circle, or a jail support network. This is one of the most significant developments in contemporary Jewish life: anti-Zionist activism is becoming a site of Jewish formation.

Critics often argue that these movements are performative, emotionally driven, or shaped by social pressure. Sometimes movements do contain performance, simplification, or moral overconfidence. Every movement does. But to dismiss them on that basis misses the deeper point. The protests are symptoms of a legitimacy crisis that cannot be solved by criticizing activist style. If institutions want to understand why young Jews are in the streets, they must ask what failed inside the institutions. Why did so many Jews conclude that official Jewish spaces could not speak honestly about Palestinian suffering? Why did they feel more Jewish in protest than in synagogue? Why did they trust coalition partners more than communal leaders?

The answer is not only politics. It is moral recognition. Student movements and street protests offer a way to align Jewish identity with what activists see as the demand of conscience. They allow Jews to say publicly that the suffering of Palestinians is not outside Jewish concern. They allow Jews to refuse the role assigned to them by Zionist institutions. They allow Jews to grieve, rage, pray, and act without waiting for permission.

In New York, this public refusal has national consequences. It makes Jewish division visible. It weakens the claim that pro-Israel institutions speak for Jews as a unified bloc. It creates alternative Jewish authorities. It pressures politicians and universities. It gives Palestinian solidarity movements Jewish partners who reject the weaponization of antisemitism accusations. It also provokes backlash, deepens communal fracture, and forces unresolved questions into the open.

The new Jewish anti-Zionist movement is therefore not merely an activist trend. It is the emergence of a rival Jewish public. It has organizations, rituals, slogans, media channels, moral authorities, student networks, street practices, and coalitional alliances. It is still contested, uneven, and internally divided. But it has already changed the terms of debate. The old Zionist consensus depended on the assumption that Jewish identity would remain institutionally disciplined. Student movements, street protests, and interfaith coalitions show that discipline is breaking.

**6. Gaza, Palestine, and the Collapse of Moral Deference**

Gaza has become the breaking point for the postwar American Jewish consensus because it has made the contradiction between Jewish moral memory and Israeli state violence impossible for many Jews to avoid. Earlier debates over Israel could often be contained within familiar frameworks: security, peace process, terrorism, settlements, self-defense, democracy, occupation, religious extremism, or bad leadership. Gaza has strained those frameworks beyond repair. The scale of destruction, the visibility of civilian suffering, the repeated language of military necessity, and the continuing support of American political institutions have forced many Jews to ask whether the old habits of deference to Israel still have any moral legitimacy.

Moral deference is the assumption that Israel deserves interpretive benefit of the doubt because of Jewish history, Jewish vulnerability, antisemitism, the Holocaust, hostile neighbors, terrorism, and the need for a Jewish refuge. This deference does not always require uncritical support. Many liberal Zionists have criticized Israeli policy while still granting Israel a foundational moral presumption: Israel may err, but its basic project is legitimate; Israel may use excessive force, but its wars are defensive; Israel may occupy, but occupation is temporary; Israel may be harsh, but Jewish survival requires harsh choices. Gaza has damaged this

presumption. For many Jews, especially younger Jews, the images and reports from Gaza no longer fit the inherited moral vocabulary. A state presented as refuge appears as a destroyer. A people remembered as vulnerable appear as rulers over another vulnerable people. A military described as defensive appears to many as an instrument of collective punishment.

This collapse of moral deference does not mean that Israeli Jewish fear is imaginary. Israeli civilians have suffered real trauma, and Jewish fears of annihilation are historically grounded. Nor does it mean that Hamas, armed struggle, hostage-taking, or attacks on civilians can be ignored or romanticized. A serious moral analysis must reject the killing of civilians regardless of the perpetrator. But the central shift among Jewish anti-Zionists is that Israeli fear no longer functions as a moral solvent that dissolves Palestinian suffering. Jewish trauma no longer automatically overrides Palestinian trauma. The memory of Jewish victimhood no longer grants indefinite permission to Israeli power.

The Gaza crisis has also revealed a profound asymmetry in American public language. Israeli grief is often treated as morally self-evident, while Palestinian grief must struggle to be recognized as human, political, and historically meaningful. Israeli military action is explained through context, intention, and security necessity. Palestinian death is often placed under suspicion, abstraction, or numerical dispute. Jewish anti-Zionists increasingly reject this asymmetry. They argue that a Jewish ethical response cannot depend on making Palestinian life less narratable than Jewish life.

For many Jews, Gaza has also exposed the limits of communal education. They were taught to remember ghettos, expulsions, pogroms, refugees, walls, camps, and state violence, but they were not taught to see Palestinians through those same categories. They were taught that Jewish suffering had universal significance, but they were discouraged from applying that universality to the people living under Israeli siege and occupation. Gaza has forced the suppressed comparison into consciousness. Not as a crude equivalence between historical events, but as a moral question: what is Jewish memory for if it cannot recognize another people's dispossession?

The collapse of moral deference is therefore not only political. It is spiritual and pedagogical. It marks the failure of an inherited Jewish moral education to contain the implications of its own teachings. If Jewish memory teaches vigilance against dehumanization, then Palestinians must not be dehumanized. If Jewish ethics teaches concern for the stranger, then Palestinians cannot be excluded from concern. If Jewish history teaches the danger of state violence, then Israeli state violence must be judged rather than excused. If Jewish survival is sacred, then Palestinian survival cannot be treated as secondary.

Gaza has made these questions urgent because the suffering is not hidden in archives. It circulates in real time. Images, testimonies, casualty reports, destroyed neighborhoods, grieving parents, wounded children, collapsed hospitals, displaced families, and desperate appeals appear directly on screens. Traditional institutions can contest interpretation, but they can no longer fully control visibility. This visibility has transformed moral perception. Younger Jews are not merely reading about Gaza through institutional statements. They are seeing Gaza through journalists, doctors, aid workers, Palestinian families, independent media, and social platforms. The old gatekeeping structure has weakened.

The result is a rupture in trust. Many Jews no longer trust mainstream Jewish institutions, American politicians, legacy media, or Israeli officials to describe Palestinian suffering honestly. They see delay, euphemism, selective outrage, and disciplined silence. They hear calls for Jewish safety but not equal urgency for Palestinian life. They hear concern about antisemitism but not equal concern about anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian repression, or Islamophobia. This asymmetry has become morally unbearable for a growing number of Jewish dissidents.

Gaza is therefore the place where the postwar consensus confronts its own moral limit. A consensus built around Jewish vulnerability can survive criticism of Israeli policy. It can survive debates over settlements, borders, and diplomacy. It cannot easily survive a widely perceived mass destruction of Palestinian life carried out by a state claiming to act in the name of Jewish survival and supported by American Jewish institutions. That is why Gaza has become a generational breaking point. It has forced the question that the old consensus most feared: what if Jewish safety, as organized through Zionist state power, has become inseparable from another people's insecurity?

### 6.1 The Gaza War as a Generational Breaking Point

The Gaza war has become a generational breaking point because it has revealed that younger and older Jews often inhabit different moral histories. For many older Jews, Israel remains linked to refuge, survival, rescue, the Holocaust, the wars of 1948 and 1967, Soviet Jewry, antisemitism, and the fear of Jewish helplessness. For many younger Jews, Israel is encountered through occupation, siege, settlements, surveillance, bombing campaigns, human rights reports, viral images of destruction, and the language of apartheid and settler colonialism. The same state is therefore perceived through different founding images. One generation sees a shield. Another sees a sword.

This difference does not map perfectly onto age. There are older Jewish anti-Zionists and younger Jewish Zionists. But generational experience matters because political memory is formed through first images. A person whose formative image of Israel is a small state surrounded by enemies will interpret later violence differently from a person whose formative

image is a powerful military occupying and bombing Palestinians. The first may see force as tragic necessity. The second may see it as systemic domination. The first may fear Jewish disappearance. The second may fear Jewish moral corruption through power.

The Gaza war intensified this divide because it unfolded in an information environment very different from that of earlier conflicts. Younger Jews watched destruction, testimony, protest, and counter-narrative circulate outside mainstream institutional channels. They saw Palestinian voices directly. They saw Jewish activists arrested in public protest. They saw university administrators respond to donor and political pressure. They saw elected officials defend military aid while speaking the language of human rights. They saw institutions insist on complexity while civilians died. For many, the result was not confusion but clarity: the old moral vocabulary seemed designed to delay judgment.

Older communal leaders often responded by emphasizing context: Hamas attacks, Israeli hostages, Jewish trauma, regional threats, the history of antisemitism, and the danger of demonizing Israel. These concerns are not invented. They are part of the real context. But younger dissenters increasingly argue that context has become a method of moral postponement. They hear context invoked not to deepen understanding, but to prevent condemnation. They ask why Palestinian suffering must always be contextualized before it can be mourned, while Jewish suffering is granted immediate moral recognition.

The breaking point is also emotional. Many younger Jews have experienced alienation from parents, grandparents, rabbis, teachers, donors, campus organizations, and childhood institutions. The conflict over Gaza enters family dinners, holiday gatherings, synagogue lobbies, group chats, classrooms, and friendships. It is not only a political disagreement but a crisis of inheritance. Younger Jews are asking whether they can accept the Jewish identity handed to them if that identity requires defense of Gaza's destruction. Older Jews are asking whether the younger generation has abandoned the hard lessons of Jewish history.

This intergenerational conflict is intensified by different relationships to fear. The older postwar consensus was organized around fear of Jewish vulnerability. Jewish fear was treated as the central fact that responsible politics had to respect. Younger anti-Zionist Jews do not necessarily deny Jewish fear, but they are less willing to allow it to govern all moral interpretation. They ask whether fear has become an idol. They ask whether Jewish institutions have built an entire politics around preventing another catastrophe while ignoring the catastrophe inflicted on Palestinians. They ask whether fear can excuse anything if it is never placed under ethical judgment.

The Gaza war has also damaged liberal Zionism as a generational bridge. Liberal Zionism once allowed younger Jews to remain attached to Israel while criticizing occupation, settlements, or

right-wing governments. It promised that Israel's democratic and Jewish character could be reconciled, that peace was possible, that occupation was temporary, and that moral repair remained available. Gaza has made that bridge far less stable. Many younger Jews now see liberal Zionism as a language of evasion, a way of preserving emotional attachment to Israel while avoiding the structural violence required by Jewish statehood.

For some, the break has been sudden. A young Jew raised with Israel trips, Hebrew school narratives, Holocaust education, and communal loyalty may encounter Gaza as a moral shock that reorganizes everything. For others, the break has been gradual: first discomfort with settlements, then anger over occupation, then opposition to military campaigns, then rejection of Zionism itself. Gaza has accelerated these trajectories. It has compressed years of doubt into weeks or months of radicalization.

The generational breaking point also affects Jewish authority. Older institutions often assume that continuity means transmitting attachment to Israel. But if that transmission fails, their authority weakens. A synagogue can teach Israel advocacy, a federation can fund Israel education, a campus organization can sponsor trips, and a family can tell stories of Israeli heroism. Yet if younger Jews interpret Gaza as evidence of moral failure, institutional pedagogy may produce the opposite of its intention. The more insistently institutions demand loyalty, the more they may generate dissent.

This is why Gaza is not merely another episode in the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is a crisis in Jewish reproduction. The question is whether the next generation of American Jews will inherit Zionism as a binding moral identity or reject it as a burden. The answer is not settled, but the rupture is already visible. The Gaza war has made it impossible for many Jews to return to the older language of uncomplicated solidarity. Once the moral deference collapses, it cannot easily be restored by institutional appeals to unity.

**6.2 Human Rights Language Versus Communal Loyalty**

One of the central conflicts exposed by Gaza is the conflict between human rights language and communal loyalty. American Jewish institutions often teach universal values: dignity, justice, memory, equality, protection of minorities, resistance to hatred, and moral responsibility after catastrophe. Human rights language gives these values a global vocabulary. It asks that every person be treated as human regardless of ethnicity, religion, nationality, or political identity. Yet when these principles are applied to Palestinians, communal loyalty to Israel often intervenes.

The result is a moral contradiction. Jewish students and activists may be taught that oppression must be opposed, that silence is complicity, that human life is sacred, and that historical trauma imposes responsibility. But when they describe Palestinians as victims of Israeli domination, they may be told that they are being simplistic, disloyal, dangerous, or antisemitic. The universal

language remains acceptable until it challenges the protected object of communal loyalty. At that point, universalism is treated as betrayal.

This contradiction is especially acute because human rights language does not depend on ethnic loyalty. It does not ask whether victims are members of one's group before recognizing their suffering. It does not grant moral immunity to states because their dominant population has suffered historically. It asks whether civilians are being killed, displaced, starved, degraded, imprisoned, occupied, or denied basic rights. For Jewish anti-Zionists, this language provides a way to escape the emotional trap in which Jewish fear always outranks Palestinian life.

Communal loyalty, by contrast, operates through attachment, memory, and perceived obligation. It asks Jews to stand with their people, especially when Jews are threatened. It treats public criticism as dangerous when enemies are watching. It emphasizes the emotional and historical reality that Jews have often been abandoned by others. In this framework, support for Israel becomes an act of collective self-protection. Even when Israel acts harshly, Jews are expected to understand the reasons, defend the context, and avoid strengthening hostile narratives.

Both human rights language and communal loyalty speak to real moral concerns. Human rights language can become abstract if it ignores historical trauma, terrorism, antisemitism, and the vulnerability of Israeli civilians. Communal loyalty can become corrupt if it excuses domination, suppresses truth, or makes Jewish suffering the only suffering that counts. The Gaza crisis has revealed that these two moral systems are now in open conflict for many Jews.

The decisive question is whether loyalty has limits. If loyalty to a community requires silence about the suffering of another people, then it becomes morally dangerous. If loyalty to Jewish memory requires defense of state violence, then memory has been politicized into obedience. If loyalty to Israel requires ignoring Palestinians except as threats, then Jewish ethical imagination has been narrowed. Anti-Zionist Jews argue that true loyalty to Jewish tradition may require disloyalty to Zionist institutions.

This reversal is central to the new movement. Mainstream institutions often accuse anti-Zionist Jews of disloyalty. Anti-Zionist Jews answer that the institutions themselves have betrayed Jewish ethics. They argue that Judaism cannot be reduced to ethnonational solidarity, that Jewish memory cannot be used to shield injustice, and that communal loyalty is not sacred when it protects oppression. In their view, dissent is not abandonment of Jewishness but fidelity to its deepest moral demands.

Human rights language also changes the status of Palestinians in Jewish discourse. Under the older consensus, Palestinians were often discussed primarily in relation to Israeli security: as militants, negotiators, refugees, demographic challenges, victims of unfortunate conflict, or

obstacles to peace. Human rights language insists that Palestinians be seen as subjects in their own right, with histories, rights, griefs, claims, and political agency. This shift is profound because it breaks the habit of treating Palestinian life as secondary to Jewish self-understanding.

Gaza has forced this shift because the suffering is too visible to remain peripheral. When homes, hospitals, schools, families, and neighborhoods are destroyed, the language of security becomes morally insufficient. It may explain what a state says it is doing, but it cannot exhaust the ethical meaning of what is done. Human rights language asks what happens to the people beneath the bombs, behind the walls, in the camps, at the crossings, under siege, and in mourning. It restores the human face that strategic language often removes.

Communal loyalty often responds by warning that such language can be used selectively against Israel while ignoring worse abuses elsewhere. This concern is not always baseless. International politics is often hypocritical, and Israel can be singled out in ways that reflect prejudice or geopolitical convenience. But selectivity elsewhere does not absolve Jewish responsibility here. For American Jews whose institutions actively support Israel, the question is not whether every injustice in the world receives equal attention. The question is whether Jews will speak honestly about the injustice done in their name or with their support.

Human rights language also challenges the exceptionalism of Jewish suffering. Jewish suffering is historically specific and must be remembered in its specificity. But if that suffering is used to make Jewish power exempt from judgment, then memory becomes a hierarchy rather than a warning. Anti-Zionist Jews argue that the lesson of Jewish history is not that Jews must always side with Jews, but that Jews must recognize the mechanisms of dehumanization wherever they appear. This is why Gaza has become a test of Jewish universalism.

The conflict between human rights and communal loyalty is unlikely to disappear. Some Jews will continue to prioritize Jewish solidarity in a hostile world. Others will insist that solidarity without justice is tribalism. Some will seek a synthesis, arguing for Israeli security and Palestinian rights together. But Gaza has made the old synthesis harder to maintain. The language of equal rights does not easily coexist with permanent siege, occupation, displacement, and unequal sovereignty. Once Jews adopt a human rights framework seriously, they must ask whether Zionism can survive it.

### 6.3 Why Younger Jews Are Rejecting Inherited Narratives

Younger Jews are rejecting inherited narratives because those narratives no longer explain the world they see. The inherited story often begins with Jewish vulnerability, exile, antisemitism, the Holocaust, refuge, national rebirth, democratic Israel, defensive wars, terrorism, and the hope for peace. This story contains real historical elements, but it frequently marginalizes Palestinian experience. It tells Jews why Israel matters to Jews, but not what Zionism has meant

for Palestinians. For younger Jews exposed to Palestinian testimony and images of Israeli domination, the omission appears not accidental but structural.

The first reason for rejection is the collapse of informational control. Earlier generations often received Israel narratives through family, synagogue, Hebrew school, mainstream newspapers, communal organizations, and official trips. Younger Jews encounter a far wider set of sources: Palestinian journalists, independent media, social platforms, human rights organizations, dissident Israelis, anti-Zionist Jews, scholars, and direct images from Gaza and the West Bank. This does not guarantee perfect understanding. Digital media can mislead as well as reveal. But it prevents institutions from monopolizing interpretation. Young Jews can compare the official story with other evidence, and many find the official story morally incomplete.

The second reason is the failure of the peace process narrative. Older liberal Zionism often relied on the idea that occupation was temporary and that two states remained the reasonable horizon. Younger Jews have seen that horizon recede for most of their lives. They have watched settlements grow, Israeli politics move rightward, Palestinian fragmentation deepen, Gaza remain under blockade, and American diplomacy repeat formulas that do not change facts on the ground. The promise of eventual peace no longer functions as an answer to present injustice. For many, it looks like a mechanism for postponing accountability.

The third reason is the moral education of American liberalism itself. Many younger Jews were raised in environments that emphasized civil rights, anti-racism, minority protection, refugee concern, opposition to authoritarianism, and suspicion of militarized policing. When they apply these values to Israel-Palestine, Zionist narratives often appear inconsistent. Why should Jewish demographic control be defended if ethnic hierarchy is wrong? Why should Palestinian refugees be excluded if refugee rights matter? Why should military occupation be normalized if domination is wrong? Why should criticism of a state be treated as hatred of a people? These questions arise from the values many Jewish institutions themselves helped teach.

The fourth reason is alienation from fear-based identity. Younger Jews do not necessarily deny antisemitism, but many reject the idea that Jewish identity must be organized primarily around threat. They want Jewishness to mean learning, ethics, ritual, humor, solidarity, memory, family, spirituality, justice, and cultural creativity, not permanent mobilization around danger. When Israel is presented as the answer to Jewish fear, and when that answer appears to require Palestinian suffering, they reject the premise. They do not want Jewish continuity to depend on another people's dispossession.

The fifth reason is the visibility of Palestinian humanity. Inherited narratives often rendered Palestinians abstract. Younger Jews encounter Palestinians as writers, students, doctors, parents, children, journalists, artists, historians, and mourners. Once Palestinians are

encountered as full human beings, the older security-centered narrative loses control. A people cannot be reduced to threat after their stories are heard. This human recognition does not resolve every political question, but it changes the moral starting point. The question becomes not how Israel can manage Palestinians, but how Palestinians can be free.

The sixth reason is distrust of institutions. Many younger Jews see mainstream Jewish organizations, politicians, universities, and media outlets as managing perception rather than telling the truth. When institutions condemn antisemitism but minimize anti-Palestinian racism, defend free speech selectively, punish dissent, or use donor power to shape debate, young Jews learn to distrust their authority. The more institutions insist that anti-Zionism is outside legitimate Jewish life, the more some young Jews conclude that legitimate Jewish life must be built elsewhere.

The seventh reason is the availability of alternative Jewish communities. In the past, rejecting Zionism could mean isolation from organized Jewish life. Today, anti-Zionist Jews can find organizations, prayer groups, reading circles, social media networks, rabbis, student groups, and protest communities that affirm their Jewishness. This changes the cost of dissent. A young Jew no longer has to choose between conscience and Jewish belonging. Anti-Zionist spaces offer a different form of belonging, one that may feel more honest than inherited institutions.

The eighth reason is the perception that Zionism has become inseparable from American empire. Younger anti-Zionist Jews often see U.S. military aid, diplomatic protection, lobbying, surveillance partnerships, police exchanges, weapons production, and Middle East strategy as part of the same system. Israel is not seen only as a Jewish refuge but as a military ally embedded in imperial power. This perception makes Zionism appear less like liberation and more like participation in domination. For Jews shaped by antiwar politics, this is decisive.

The ninth reason is the failure of moral exceptionalism. Younger Jews increasingly reject the idea that Jewish suffering grants Jewish institutions special authority to define justice. They may honor Holocaust memory deeply while refusing to let it function as a shield for Israel. This is painful for older generations who fear that universalizing Holocaust memory can dilute its Jewish specificity. But younger anti-Zionists often argue that memory is dishonored when it is used to excuse what should be condemned. For them, the universal lesson of Jewish suffering is not optional; it is the point.

Finally, younger Jews are rejecting inherited narratives because the emotional center of those narratives has shifted. The old story asked Jews to identify with Israeli vulnerability. The new perception asks Jews to identify with Palestinian vulnerability as well. Once that identification occurs, the moral map changes. The Israeli soldier is no longer the only figure of Jewish concern.

The Palestinian child, prisoner, refugee, doctor, mother, journalist, and mourner enter the Jewish field of responsibility. That entrance changes everything.

This rejection is not always final or coherent. Many younger Jews remain confused, conflicted, grieving, angry, or afraid. Some move between liberal Zionism, non-Zionism, post-Zionism, and anti-Zionism. Some still love Israel as family, language, memory, or place while opposing its state structure. Others reject the whole inherited framework. The movement is uneven because identity is uneven. But the direction of the rupture is clear: inherited narratives no longer command automatic belief.

The consequences for American Jewish life are profound. Institutions that assume young Jews can be brought back through better messaging misunderstand the problem. The issue is not only messaging. It is trust, morality, visibility, and power. Younger Jews are not merely asking for a more attractive Israel story. They are asking whether the story is true. They are asking whether Jewish identity can survive honesty about Palestine. They are asking whether Jewish ethics require a break with Zionism. No amount of public relations can answer those questions if the underlying reality remains unchanged.

**7. Max Blumenthal and the Journalism of Zionist Power**

Max Blumenthal occupies a distinctive and controversial place in the contemporary Jewish anti-Zionist landscape because he treats Zionism not merely as an ideology, a national movement, or a set of policies, but as a structure of power embedded in media, lobbying, war narratives, donor networks, American empire, and the policing of acceptable speech. His significance is not that he represents all Jewish anti-Zionists, or that his journalism should be treated as beyond criticism. His significance is that he names the machinery that more respectable forms of liberal criticism often leave unnamed. He is important because he refuses the language of polite exception. He does not ask only whether Israel has made mistakes. He asks how Israeli power is protected, how American consent is manufactured, how dissent is punished, and how Jewish identity is mobilized to defend a state project.

This makes Blumenthal a useful figure through which to examine the difference between liberal Zionist critique and anti-Zionist exposure. Liberal Zionist critique usually remains within the boundaries of communal respectability. It may criticize settlements, condemn right-wing Israeli governments, mourn Palestinian suffering, and warn that occupation endangers Israel's democratic character. But it tends to preserve the moral legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state and the emotional legitimacy of Zionism as a Jewish liberation movement. Blumenthal's work breaks with that framework. He treats Zionism as inseparable from dispossession, militarism,

propaganda, and imperial alliance. For him, the problem is not that Israel has strayed from its moral foundation. The problem is that the foundation itself must be interrogated.

Blumenthal's Jewishness is relevant but not sufficient to explain his role. He is not important simply because he is a Jew criticizing Israel. Many Jews criticize Israel. What distinguishes him is the severity of his critique and his focus on power. He positions himself not as a wounded liberal seeking to restore Israel's soul, but as a dissident journalist exposing the institutions, narratives, and coercive mechanisms that protect Israel from accountability. This stance places him outside the polite boundaries of mainstream Jewish debate, but also gives his work force among readers who believe those boundaries exist precisely to prevent honest analysis.

His journalism should be understood as part of a broader dissident tradition in which Jewish writers, activists, and intellectuals challenge the communal demand for loyalty to Zionism. Such figures often pay a reputational price. They are accused of betrayal, extremism, self-hatred, recklessness, or indifference to antisemitism. Blumenthal's case is especially intense because he does not soften his critique to preserve institutional access. He writes and speaks as someone who regards the mainstream consensus as itself implicated in violence. That posture makes him influential among anti-Zionists and deeply objectionable to defenders of Israel.

The importance of Blumenthal for this paper is not that he should be adopted uncritically as the final authority on Israel, Palestine, or American Jewish politics. Rather, he clarifies a central feature of the present rupture: the debate is no longer only about Israel's conduct. It is about the systems that make Israel's conduct politically sustainable. Once that question is asked, the object of analysis expands. The subject is no longer only Gaza or the West Bank. It becomes Washington, New York, journalism, campaign finance, universities, censorship, weapons manufacturers, evangelical Zionism, Jewish communal institutions, and the emotional management of antisemitism. This is the terrain Blumenthal insists on entering.

### 7.1 From Liberal Zionist Critique to Anti-Zionist Exposure

The path from liberal Zionist critique to anti-Zionist exposure often begins with disappointment. Many American Jews first encounter criticism of Israel through the liberal Zionist framework. They are told that Israel is fundamentally legitimate, democratic, and necessary, but that occupation, settlements, religious extremism, racism, or particular governments threaten its moral promise. This framework allows criticism without rupture. It preserves emotional attachment while acknowledging moral difficulty. It says, in effect, that Israel can be saved from its worst tendencies.

Blumenthal's work is situated beyond that framework. It does not seek to save Zionism from corruption. It treats the corruption as structural. From this perspective, the liberal Zionist story fails because it misidentifies the problem. If Palestinian dispossession is not an accident but a

condition of Jewish statehood, then better politicians or renewed negotiations cannot solve the contradiction. If military domination is required to maintain demographic and political supremacy, then the problem is not merely occupation after 1967 but the deeper logic of an ethnonational state. If American institutions repeatedly protect Israel from consequences, then the issue is not ignorance but organized power.

This shift from critique to exposure is crucial. Critique accepts the legitimacy of the object while identifying defects. Exposure asks what must remain hidden for the object to appear legitimate. Liberal critique may say that Israel's bombardment of Gaza is excessive or strategically disastrous. Anti-Zionist exposure asks how the bombardment is narrated as self-defense, how civilian death is minimized, how journalists are disciplined, how politicians are funded or threatened, how think tanks frame the debate, how social media speech is monitored, and how accusations of antisemitism are deployed to manage public outrage. The difference is not merely tone. It is analytical scope.

Blumenthal's style is therefore adversarial. He writes as a prosecutor of narratives. His work often focuses on contradiction, hypocrisy, concealed relationships, public-relations strategy, and the gap between official language and material reality. This adversarial posture is one reason he attracts readers who distrust mainstream media and institutions. They see him as willing to say what more respectable commentators know but will not say. They believe he reveals the infrastructure of consent.

That same posture is also why he is widely criticized. Critics argue that adversarial journalism can overstate, simplify, or interpret every institutional action through a predetermined framework of power. They may contend that Blumenthal's work sometimes gives too little weight to Israeli civilian fear, Jewish historical trauma, antisemitism, or the internal diversity of Jewish opinion. These criticisms should be considered rather than dismissed automatically. A serious paper must avoid replacing one orthodoxy with another. Anti-Zionist analysis must not become a mirror image of Zionist discipline, where only one narrative is permitted.

Yet the intensity of criticism directed at Blumenthal also reveals the boundary he crosses. Liberal critics of Israel may be tolerated if they remain within the family argument. Blumenthal refuses the family argument as the governing frame. He does not ask how Jews can repair Zionism. He asks how Zionism has organized Jewish identity in service of state power. That question threatens institutions built on the assumption that support for Israel is a responsible expression of Jewish continuity.

The movement from liberal critique to anti-Zionist exposure also reflects a broader historical disillusionment. For decades, liberal Zionists warned that occupation would corrupt Israel. But from the anti-Zionist perspective, those warnings became a ritual without consequence.

Settlements expanded. Gaza remained besieged. Palestinian rights remained subordinate. American aid continued. Israeli politics moved further right. Liberal concern did not stop the system. It often made the system more palatable by preserving hope that reform was always just beyond the next election or negotiation.

Blumenthal's anti-Zionist exposure rejects that hope as a form of delay. He treats liberal Zionism as a management ideology that allows morally troubled Jews to remain attached to Israel while avoiding the conclusion that the state's foundational logic is the issue. This is why his work resonates with those who feel that polite concern has become complicity. He gives language to the suspicion that mainstream criticism functions less to end injustice than to maintain the credibility of those who benefit from appearing morally conflicted.

For Jewish anti-Zionists, this shift has identity consequences. To move from liberal critique to anti-Zionist exposure is to lose access to certain forms of communal belonging. The critic may still be welcome at the table. The exposer may not be. The critic says the family has made mistakes. The exposer says the family story itself conceals harm. Blumenthal's role is significant because he has chosen the second position and accepted the exile that comes with it.

**7.2 The Grayzone, Empire, War Propaganda, and Media Discipline**

The Grayzone is central to Blumenthal's public role because it provides an institutional platform for a style of journalism that links Israel-Palestine to American empire, war propaganda, intelligence narratives, sanctions regimes, media conformity, and the politics of regime change. In this framework, Israel is not analyzed only as a Jewish state or regional actor. It is analyzed as part of a wider imperial system in which the United States projects power through allies, weapons, information management, lobbying, and ideological discipline.

This anti-imperial frame distinguishes Blumenthal from many Jewish critics whose concern remains primarily internal to Jewish ethics or Israeli democracy. For Blumenthal, Israel is not simply a Jewish moral problem. It is an American imperial problem. U.S. weapons, diplomatic protection, congressional support, media framing, and donor influence are not secondary. They are part of the machinery that makes Israeli policy possible. The question is therefore not only what Israel does, but why the American political system repeatedly enables it.

War propaganda is one of the central themes in this analysis. Modern war depends on narrative. Civilian death must be justified, denied, minimized, contextualized, or blamed on the enemy. Military objectives must be framed as defensive. Critics must be described as naïve, extremist, disloyal, or aligned with terrorism. Journalists must decide which sources are credible, which images are shown, which deaths are individualized, and which claims are repeated without skepticism. Blumenthal's work often focuses on these processes of narrative construction.

Media discipline is the domestic counterpart to war propaganda. It refers to the ways journalists, editors, academics, politicians, students, and public figures learn the boundaries of acceptable speech. Some discipline is explicit: firings, cancellations, donor pressure, legal threats, congressional hearings, blacklists, or public smear campaigns. Some is implicit: career caution, editorial hesitation, fear of accusations, self-censorship, and the desire to remain respectable. The result is a narrowed public discourse in which certain criticisms of Israel are treated as dangerous even when they are evidence-based.

Blumenthal's importance lies in his insistence that this discipline is not incidental. He views it as a necessary support structure for Israeli impunity. If Americans saw Palestinians as fully human, if journalists described Israeli violence without euphemism, if politicians feared voters more than donors, if universities protected anti-Zionist speech as firmly as other political speech, and if Jewish institutions could not monopolize the definition of antisemitism, then U.S. support for Israel would become harder to sustain. Media discipline therefore protects policy.

This argument is especially relevant to New York because the city is a media and institutional capital. Newsrooms, publishers, universities, philanthropic networks, advocacy groups, and political donors converge there. The management of Israel-Palestine discourse is not abstract in such a city. It occurs through editorial decisions, campus controversies, museum statements, donor calls, protest coverage, and public accusations. New York is where media discipline can be seen operating in real time.

The anti-imperial frame also explains why Blumenthal connects Israel-Palestine to other conflicts. He often treats war narratives as transferable. The same mechanisms that justify intervention, sanctions, proxy war, or regime change elsewhere can be used to justify Israeli military action: demonization of enemies, selective human rights language, atrocity claims, suppression of inconvenient context, and moral simplification. Whether one agrees with every comparison or not, the method is clear. Israel is analyzed within a larger system of American-aligned information warfare.

This approach appeals to readers who distrust the moral selectivity of Western foreign policy. They see that some civilian victims receive saturation coverage while others are minimized. Some states are sanctioned while others are armed. Some occupations are condemned while others are rationalized. Some dissidents are celebrated while others are censored. Blumenthal's anti-imperial journalism gives these readers a framework for understanding Israel not as an exception, but as one case within a broader structure of power.

The danger of any totalizing anti-imperial framework is that it may understate local agency, ideological diversity, internal conflict, and the independent reality of regional actors. Israel is not merely an American puppet. Palestinians are not merely symbols of anti-imperial struggle.

Jewish institutions are not monolithic. American media are not perfectly coordinated. A responsible analysis must avoid simplifying all actors into a single machine. Still, the existence of complexity does not negate the existence of structure. Blumenthal's contribution is to force attention onto the structure.

For Jewish anti-Zionists, this structural analysis is liberating because it moves beyond guilt and sentiment. It does not ask only whether individual Jews feel bad about Gaza. It asks what institutions make Gaza possible. It asks how money moves, how narratives are formed, how politicians are pressured, how dissent is contained, and how moral language is weaponized. This can be painful because it implicates American Jewish institutions in systems larger than themselves. But it also clarifies why individual moral discomfort is insufficient. If the machinery remains intact, private anguish changes nothing.

The Grayzone's role in this ecosystem is therefore both journalistic and symbolic. It represents a refusal to seek approval from the institutions being criticized. That refusal gives it freedom and makes it vulnerable to marginalization. Mainstream outlets can dismiss it as fringe. Supporters can treat that dismissal as proof that mainstream outlets are protecting power. The resulting conflict is part of the broader crisis of trust in media. Israel-Palestine has become one of the issues where that crisis is most intense.

**7.3 Blumenthal's Place in the Jewish Dissident Tradition**

Blumenthal belongs to a recognizable Jewish dissident tradition: the Jew who publicly challenges the dominant Jewish institutional narrative in the name of a broader truth, a deeper ethics, or a refusal of tribal discipline. This figure has appeared in many forms across modern Jewish history: religious anti-Zionists, socialist internationalists, diasporists, antiwar intellectuals, civil rights radicals, critics of nationalism, and Jewish writers who reject communal respectability. Such figures are often treated as dangerous because they break the expectation that Jews must close ranks when Jewish interests are said to be at stake.

The dissident Jew occupies an unstable position. Inside the community, he may be accused of betrayal. Outside the community, he may be used by others for purposes he does not control. His Jewishness gives his critique particular force, but it also makes him vulnerable to being instrumentalized. Anti-Zionist Jews must therefore navigate a narrow path: they must speak honestly against Zionist power without feeding hatred of Jews as Jews. Blumenthal's critics often argue that he fails this test. His supporters argue that the accusation itself is a tool for preventing the test from being attempted.

The importance of this tension cannot be overstated. Jewish dissidents against Zionism are not merely making claims about Israel. They are contesting the meaning of loyalty. The mainstream institutional view often defines loyalty as defense of Jewish collective security, which is assumed

to include defense of Israel. The dissident view defines loyalty as fidelity to truth, justice, and the ethical demands of Jewish history, even when Jewish institutions reject that fidelity. The conflict is therefore not between loyalty and betrayal, but between rival definitions of loyalty.

Blumenthal's place in this tradition is sharpened by his focus on propaganda. Many Jewish dissidents speak primarily as moral witnesses. Blumenthal speaks as an investigator of narrative power. He asks how moral perception is organized before people make judgments. Who is allowed to be a victim? Who is presumed credible? Which deaths are named? Which histories are omitted? Which organizations are presented as representative? Which accusations end debate? In this sense, his journalism is not only about facts but about the conditions under which facts become publicly meaningful.

This makes him especially relevant to the New York rupture. New York's Jewish anti-Zionist movement is not only fighting Israeli policy. It is fighting a representational regime. That regime claims to speak for Jews, defines antisemitism in ways that often protect Zionism, frames Palestinian resistance through security language, and treats anti-Zionist Jews as marginal or pathological. Blumenthal's work gives that regime a name and a structure. He helps translate diffuse frustration into a theory of power.

His role is also generational. Younger Jews encountering Blumenthal may not see him as a communal heretic in the way older institutions do. They may see him as someone who says openly what they have come to suspect: that the stories they inherited were incomplete, that media narratives are managed, that Israel's power depends on American complicity, and that accusations of antisemitism are often used to discipline dissent. This does not mean they accept every claim he makes. It means he gives permission to ask forbidden questions.

At the same time, a mature anti-Zionist movement cannot depend on any single journalist or turn dissent into personality politics. Blumenthal's importance should be analyzed, not mythologized. Jewish anti-Zionism is broader than one writer, one outlet, or one ideological current. It includes religious communities, student organizers, rabbis, Palestinians and Jewish coalition partners, legal advocates, scholars, former Zionists, socialists, human rights workers, and ordinary Jews who have reached a point of moral refusal. Blumenthal is one node in this constellation, not its total expression.

His presence nevertheless reveals something essential: anti-Zionist Jewish dissent becomes most threatening when it moves from moral discomfort to institutional analysis. A Jew who says "I am troubled by Israel" can be absorbed. A Jew who says "the institutions that claim to represent us are manufacturing consent for domination" cannot be so easily absorbed. Blumenthal represents the second type. He does not ask for inclusion in the old consensus. He attacks the consensus as an object of investigation.

This is why his work provokes such polarized reactions. For supporters, he is one of the few journalists willing to confront Zionist power without euphemism. For critics, he is reckless, conspiratorial, or indifferent to the dangers facing Jews. The polarization itself is revealing. It shows that the boundary between legitimate criticism and forbidden exposure remains one of the central battlegrounds in Jewish public life. Blumenthal stands on that boundary and repeatedly crosses it.

In the wider history of Jewish dissent, such boundary-crossers often appear excessive in their own time. They offend communal instincts, disrupt polite speech, and expose contradictions that institutions would prefer to manage quietly. Some are later vindicated, some are not, and many remain contested. The point is not to canonize Blumenthal, but to recognize that his journalism expresses a real historical pressure: the collapse of trust in the institutions that fused Jewish identity with Zionism.

His place in the Jewish dissident tradition therefore lies in his refusal to treat Jewish safety as a reason to suspend political analysis. He does not deny that Jews have enemies. He denies that Jewish vulnerability should make Israeli power immune from scrutiny. He does not deny that antisemitism exists. He denies that accusations of antisemitism should be allowed to end debate over Zionism, empire, and Palestine. He does not deny Jewish history. He denies that Jewish history belongs to the institutions that invoke it most loudly.

For the purposes of this paper, Blumenthal helps clarify the stakes of the New York rupture. The conflict is not only between Zionists and anti-Zionists. It is between two models of Jewish public speech. One model seeks legitimacy through communal responsibility, institutional caution, and protection of Jewish solidarity. The other seeks legitimacy through exposure, confrontation, and refusal of enforced consensus. Blumenthal's journalism belongs to the second model. Whether embraced or rejected, it cannot be ignored because it names the machinery behind the argument.

The future of Jewish anti-Zionism will not be determined by Blumenthal alone. But his role demonstrates that the movement is not merely emotional protest or generational discomfort. It contains an analysis of power. It asks how Zionism survives not only in Israel but in American institutions. It examines how narratives are produced, how dissent is punished, and how Jewish identity is made to serve state interests. That is why Blumenthal belongs in this paper: he represents the transition from Jewish dissent as moral anguish to Jewish dissent as structural critique.

**8. The Battle Over Who Speaks as a Jew**

The central conflict in the contemporary Jewish anti-Zionist rupture is not only over Israel, Palestine, Gaza, occupation, or U.S. foreign policy. It is also over representation: who has the authority to speak as a Jew, to speak for Jews, and to define the boundaries of legitimate Jewish identity. This battle is unavoidable because Zionism has long claimed to represent not merely one political position among Jews, but the organized expression of Jewish collective survival. When Jewish anti-Zionists reject that claim, they are not only criticizing a state. They are challenging a representational regime.

The phrase "the Jewish community" often appears in American public life as if it refers to a unified moral and political subject. Politicians invoke it, journalists quote its leaders, institutions claim to defend it, and advocacy organizations speak in its name. But Jewish life is not singular. It contains religious Jews and secular Jews, Zionists and anti-Zionists, liberals and conservatives, socialists and capitalists, Orthodox and Reform, Haredi and atheist, Israeli and diaspora, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, Mizrahi and Russian-speaking, old immigrants and new immigrants, wealthy donors and precarious students, institutional professionals and alienated outsiders. There is no single Jewish will.

The power to speak as "the Jewish community" is therefore not natural. It is institutional. It belongs to organizations with donors, media access, political relationships, professional staff, historical prestige, and recognized authority. These organizations may represent many Jews sincerely. They may perform real services and defend Jews against real antisemitism. But they do not represent all Jews, and their authority becomes contested when they treat their own political commitments as identical with Jewish identity itself.

Jewish anti-Zionism threatens this structure because it forces a distinction between Jews and the institutions that claim to speak for Jews. It says that a federation statement, an advocacy group press release, a donor letter, a synagogue board resolution, or an Israeli government position cannot automatically be treated as the voice of Jewish conscience. Anti-Zionist Jews insist that they, too, are Jews; that their dissent is not an abandonment of Jewish identity; and that Jewish ethics may require opposition to Zionism rather than loyalty to it.

This is why the battle is so bitter. If anti-Zionist Jews are acknowledged as legitimate Jewish voices, then Zionism loses its status as the presumed center of Jewish public life. If they are excluded, then Jewish institutions must explain why some Jews are not allowed to speak as Jews. The exclusion itself becomes evidence of the problem: Jewish identity is being policed to protect a political project.

The battle over who speaks as a Jew is also a battle over moral inheritance. Zionist institutions often claim continuity with Jewish memory: exile, persecution, pogroms, the Holocaust,

refugeehood, rebirth, and self-defense. Anti-Zionist Jews do not necessarily reject that memory. They contest its political interpretation. They argue that Jewish suffering should not be used to legitimate Palestinian suffering, that Jewish vulnerability should not become a permanent warrant for state violence, and that Jewish memory belongs to all Jews, not only to those who support Israel.

This struggle over memory makes the debate more than political. It is intimate. It enters families, schools, synagogues, friendships, marriages, funerals, holiday tables, and childhood education. A Jew who rejects Zionism may be accused not only of holding a bad opinion, but of betraying ancestors, survivors, relatives in Israel, or the dead. That accusation has emotional force because Jewish memory is not abstract. It is carried through names, absences, photographs, prayers, languages, and inherited fear. But the same memory may lead another Jew to the opposite conclusion: because Jews know dehumanization, they must oppose it when Palestinians suffer under Jewish state power.

Thus the debate over who speaks as a Jew cannot be resolved by counting institutions or invoking trauma. It requires recognition that Jewish identity has always been argumentative. Jewish tradition is not a single chorus but a record of dispute. The attempt to make Zionism the final test of Jewish legitimacy is historically modern and spiritually narrow. The rise of Jewish anti-Zionism in New York reveals that this test is losing its power.

**8.1 Institutional Gatekeeping and the Boundaries of Jewish Legitimacy**

Institutional gatekeeping is the process by which recognized organizations decide which Jewish voices are treated as legitimate, responsible, representative, and safe. It works through invitations, funding, employment, honors, platforms, partnerships, denunciations, educational curricula, donor pressure, and public statements. Gatekeeping does not always appear coercive. Often it appears as prudence, communal responsibility, concern for safety, or protection against antisemitism. But its effect is to define the boundaries of acceptable Jewish speech.

In the Israel-Palestine debate, gatekeeping has typically allowed criticism of Israeli policy while restricting more fundamental criticism of Zionism. A Jew may often say that a particular Israeli government is dangerous, that settlements are harmful, that occupation is morally corrosive, that Palestinian civilians deserve protection, or that a two-state solution must be preserved. These positions can remain within the family of respectable Jewish disagreement. But the Jew who says that Zionism itself is the problem, that Israel should not be a Jewish state, that Palestinian return must be taken seriously, or that U.S. aid to Israel should end may be pushed outside the boundary.

The boundary is enforced by labeling. A speaker may be called fringe, extremist, divisive, naïve, self-hating, antisemitic, or dangerous. Institutions may claim that such voices do not represent

the Jewish community. Events may be canceled. Rabbis may be pressured. Students may be investigated. Professors may be denounced. Artists may lose opportunities. Politicians may be warned. Organizations may be excluded from coalitions. The effect is not only to punish dissent after it occurs, but to teach others what not to say.

This gatekeeping is powerful because Jewish communal belonging matters. A person who dissents from Zionism may risk losing more than an argument. They may lose friends, family trust, synagogue membership, professional networks, donor support, or access to Jewish institutional life. The threat of exclusion produces self-censorship. Many Jews who are privately disturbed by Israel remain publicly silent because they fear communal punishment. The appearance of consensus is therefore partly manufactured by the suppression of visible dissent.

Anti-Zionist Jews challenge gatekeeping by refusing to accept exclusion as the price of conscience. They create alternative institutions, alternative rituals, alternative media, alternative study spaces, and alternative communities. They do not merely ask to be included in existing institutions. Increasingly, they build their own. This is historically significant because gatekeeping works only when excluded people still seek recognition from the gatekeepers. Once dissenters create rival forms of legitimacy, institutional control weakens.

The rise of Jewish anti-Zionist organizations, prayer groups, student collectives, and public protests shows that Jewish legitimacy can be generated outside legacy institutions. A Jew praying for Gaza in the street, a rabbi calling for ceasefire, a student group rejecting Zionism, or a journalist exposing lobbying networks may not receive federation approval. But they may receive recognition from other Jews who feel that official institutions have failed. Legitimacy begins to migrate.

Institutional gatekeeping is often defended as necessary because antisemitism is real. This argument cannot be dismissed. Jewish institutions have genuine responsibilities to protect Jews from hatred, harassment, violence, and discrimination. But the problem arises when protection from antisemitism becomes indistinguishable from protection of Zionism. If anti-Zionist Jews are treated as threats merely because they challenge Israel, then gatekeeping no longer protects Jewish safety. It protects ideological conformity.

The boundary between safety and discomfort is crucial. Jews should be protected from threats, slurs, harassment, exclusion, vandalism, conspiracy theories, and violence. But no political identity can demand protection from moral criticism. If a Jewish institution supports Israel, it must be open to criticism of that support. If it defends military aid, it must be open to scrutiny. If it claims to speak for Jews, other Jews must be free to reject that claim. Discomfort is not always danger. Sometimes discomfort is the experience of losing unchallenged authority.

Gatekeeping also operates through educational formation. Jewish schools, youth programs, Israel trips, campus organizations, and synagogue curricula often present Israel through a controlled moral narrative. Palestinian history may be minimized, framed as conflict background, or subordinated to Israeli security. Young Jews may learn Israeli songs, maps, wars, heroes, and trauma without learning the Nakba, military occupation, Palestinian refugeehood, or the daily mechanics of unequal rule. This is a form of gatekeeping because it shapes what Jews are allowed to know before they form political judgment.

When young Jews later discover suppressed histories, they often feel betrayed. The betrayal is not simply that Israel acted unjustly, but that Jewish institutions did not trust them with the full truth. This produces anger not only at Israel but at the domestic institutions that curated ignorance. Anti-Zionism can emerge from the collapse of educational trust.

The boundary of Jewish legitimacy is therefore shifting. Legacy institutions still hold considerable power, but they no longer control the whole field. Anti-Zionist Jews have made themselves visible enough that exclusion cannot erase them. The gatekeepers can still say these Jews are illegitimate, but they can no longer make them invisible. That change marks a major transformation in American Jewish life.

**8.2 Charges of Self-Hatred, Antisemitism, and Betrayal**

The most emotionally powerful weapons used against Jewish anti-Zionists are the charges of self-hatred, antisemitism, and betrayal. These accusations do more than criticize a political position. They attack the dissenter's identity, motives, and moral standing. They suggest that the anti-Zionist Jew is not merely wrong, but damaged, disloyal, or dangerous.

The charge of self-hatred has a long history in Jewish political argument. It implies that a Jew who publicly criticizes Jewish institutions, Israel, or Zionism has internalized hostility toward Jews. The accusation is powerful because it turns dissent into pathology. Instead of answering the dissenter's claims, it explains them away as psychological disorder or social ambition. The anti-Zionist Jew is not treated as a moral agent making an argument, but as someone acting out shame, alienation, resentment, or desire for non-Jewish approval.

This charge is often unfair and intellectually lazy. Some anti-Zionist Jews are deeply attached to Jewish life. Some are religiously observant. Some are children or grandchildren of survivors. Some are scholars of Jewish history. Some are rabbis. Some have spent years inside Zionist institutions before breaking with them. To describe such people as self-hating is often a way of avoiding the substance of their critique. It is easier to pathologize the dissenter than to ask whether Zionism has become morally indefensible.

The accusation of antisemitism is even more serious. Real antisemitism exists, and it must be opposed without hesitation. It appears in conspiracy theories, racial hatred, religious

demonization, Holocaust denial, vandalism, exclusion, violence, and collective blame against Jews as Jews. Anti-Zionist movements are not immune from antisemitic infiltration or rhetoric. Any serious anti-Zionist movement must police its own language and alliances carefully. It must reject claims that attribute hidden collective power to Jews, demonize Jews as a people, or treat Jewish identity itself as suspect.

But the reality of antisemitism does not mean that anti-Zionism is antisemitism. The distinction is essential. Zionism is a modern political movement. Israel is a state. Jewishness is a religious, ethnic, cultural, historical, and communal identity. These categories overlap, but they are not identical. To criticize Zionism is not necessarily to hate Jews. To oppose Israeli state policy is not necessarily to oppose Jewish existence. To support Palestinian liberation is not necessarily to deny Jewish safety. The attempt to collapse these distinctions is one of the central mechanisms by which dissent is disciplined.

For Jewish anti-Zionists, being accused of antisemitism can be surreal. A Jew may be told that their own interpretation of Jewish ethics is anti-Jewish. A rabbi may be told that a prayer for Palestinians endangers Jews. A student may be told that rejecting Zionism makes Jewish classmates unsafe. These accusations are painful because they turn Jewish identity against the dissenter. The anti-Zionist Jew becomes a Jew who is not allowed to define their own Jewishness.

The charge of betrayal may be the deepest accusation because it invokes family, memory, and danger. Betrayal suggests that the dissenter has sided with enemies against their own people. It often appears in moments of war, when fear is heightened and solidarity is demanded. Jewish anti-Zionists who speak during Israeli military campaigns are told that they are giving comfort to those who want Jews dead. Their timing is condemned. Their tone is condemned. Their public visibility is condemned. They are told that whatever their concerns, now is not the time.

But if “now” is never the time during war, and if occupation is treated as too complex during peace, dissent is permanently deferred. Anti-Zionist Jews reject the demand for silence because they believe silence enables violence. They argue that the moment of destruction is precisely the moment when Jews must speak. If state violence is being carried out in the name of Jewish safety, then Jewish dissent becomes urgent, not inappropriate.

The accusation of betrayal also assumes that loyalty to Jews requires loyalty to Israel. Anti-Zionist Jews deny this assumption. They argue that loyalty to Jews may require opposing a political project that endangers Jewish moral life and binds Jewish identity to domination. They may also argue that Israel’s actions increase danger for Jews worldwide by identifying Jewishness with state violence. In this view, anti-Zionism is not betrayal of Jewish safety but an attempt to separate Jewish life from a state that claims to act for all Jews.

There is another dimension to betrayal: betrayal of Palestinians. Anti-Zionist Jews often believe that American Jewish institutions have betrayed Palestinian humanity by supporting or excusing Israeli domination. They believe Jewish ethics has been betrayed by tribal loyalty. They believe Holocaust memory has been betrayed by selective application. Thus the accusation runs in both directions. Zionist institutions accuse anti-Zionist Jews of betraying the Jewish people. Anti-Zionist Jews accuse Zionist institutions of betraying Judaism's moral demands.

This reciprocal accusation makes reconciliation difficult. Each side believes the other has crossed a sacred line. For Zionists, the sacred line is Jewish survival. For anti-Zionists, the sacred line is justice for the oppressed, including Palestinians. The tragedy is that both sides may speak from real Jewish concerns: fear of annihilation and fear of moral corruption. The question is whether Jewish public life can hold both concerns without collapsing into accusation.

A more disciplined debate would distinguish between hatred, error, dissent, and complicity. Not every anti-Zionist is an antisemite. Not every Zionist is indifferent to Palestinian suffering. Not every institutional leader is cynical. Not every dissident is pure. But the current climate often rewards maximal accusation because accusation is useful. It rallies supporters, silences complexity, and marks boundaries. The cost is truth.

Jewish anti-Zionists have forced the accusations into public view. They have shown that charges of self-hatred, antisemitism, and betrayal are not only descriptions of danger. They are tools of communal power. Sometimes they identify real danger. Sometimes they suppress necessary dissent. The future of Jewish debate depends on whether Jews can tell the difference.

### 8.3 Anti-Zionist Jews as Witnesses Against Communal Consensus

Anti-Zionist Jews function as witnesses against communal consensus. Their significance lies not only in the arguments they make, but in the fact of their existence. They show that Jewish identity is not exhausted by Zionism. They show that opposition to Israel can arise from within Jewish memory, Jewish ethics, Jewish ritual, and Jewish history. They show that the phrase "the Jewish community" cannot honestly be used to erase dissent.

To be a witness is different from being a representative. Anti-Zionist Jews do not speak for all Jews, and they should not claim to. Their power comes from speaking as Jews who refuse the dominant script. They testify that another Jewish response is possible. Their presence interrupts the public equation of Jewishness with Israel advocacy. They make visible the internal fracture that institutions often try to deny.

This witness has moral force because it is costly. A non-Jewish critic of Israel may face accusations of antisemitism, but a Jewish anti-Zionist faces an additional charge: betrayal from within. They may be rejected by family, excluded from synagogues, denounced by organizations, or treated as useful tokens by non-Jewish movements. Their position is precarious. That

precarity gives their witness weight. They are not taking the easiest path to belonging. They are often sacrificing belonging in order to speak.

The witness of anti-Zionist Jews is especially powerful in moments of war. When institutions call for unity, dissenting Jews expose the moral danger of unity without justice. When public officials claim to stand with the Jewish community by supporting Israel, anti-Zionist Jews say that the Jewish community is divided. When accusations of antisemitism are used to silence Palestine advocacy, anti-Zionist Jews insist that Jewish safety cannot require Palestinian silence. Their witness breaks the symbolic machinery that turns Jewish fear into automatic political consent.

This does not mean that anti-Zionist Jews should replace Palestinians as primary witnesses to Palestinian suffering. That would reproduce another form of erasure. Palestinians do not need Jewish validation in order for their suffering to be real. The role of anti-Zionist Jews is different. They speak primarily to the Jewish and American institutions that claim Jewish identity as justification for support of Israel. Their task is to say: not in our name, not with our memory, not with our grief, not with our tradition.

The phrase “not in our name” is central because Israel claims, implicitly or explicitly, to act in the name of Jewish survival. American politicians often support Israel in the name of protecting Jews. Jewish institutions defend Israel in the name of communal responsibility. Anti-Zionist Jews reject this chain of representation. They refuse to allow their identity to be used as moral cover. This refusal does not by itself stop bombs, occupations, or funding. But it changes the legitimacy environment in which those policies operate.

Witness also has a theological dimension. In Jewish tradition, testimony matters. Memory matters. Speaking truth before power matters. Anti-Zionist Jews often understand their dissent as a form of ethical testimony: a declaration that Jewish history cannot be used to sanctify domination. Even secular activists may participate in this structure of witness when they invoke ancestors, survivors, prayers, mourning rituals, or prophetic language. They are not merely making policy claims. They are making claims about what Jewish memory demands.

The witness against communal consensus also reveals the fragility of institutional unity. A consensus that cannot tolerate witnesses is not a living consensus but a discipline system. If Jewish institutions were confident that Zionism could withstand moral scrutiny, they would not need to exclude anti-Zionist Jews so aggressively. The intensity of policing suggests anxiety. It suggests that the inherited narrative is vulnerable because dissenters are naming realities that many people already see.

Anti-Zionist Jewish witness is also generative. It creates new forms of Jewish belonging. Public protests become sites of prayer. Study groups become alternative schools. Jail support becomes community. Mourning for Palestinians becomes Jewish ritual. Coalitions become places where

Jews encounter Muslims, Christians, Palestinians, and secular activists not as threats but as partners. In these spaces, Jewish identity is reconstructed around solidarity rather than state loyalty.

This reconstruction is one of the most important developments in contemporary Jewish life. For many Jews alienated from institutional Zionism, anti-Zionist activism does not weaken Jewish identity. It strengthens it. It gives Jewishness ethical urgency. It makes tradition usable again. It allows Jews to connect memory with action. It gives them a way to remain Jewish without accepting the moral burden of Zionism.

The witness is not without risk. Anti-Zionist Jews may be romanticized by non-Jewish movements as "good Jews" in contrast to "bad Jews," a dynamic that can become antisemitic if it judges Jews only by their usefulness to anti-Israel politics. They may also become overconfident, treating their Jewish identity as automatic proof that their analysis is correct. Jewishness gives standing in a debate about Jewish representation, but it does not guarantee accuracy. Anti-Zionist Jews must remain accountable to Palestinians, to truth, and to the danger of antisemitism.

Nevertheless, their witness is historically decisive. Once Jews publicly reject Zionism in significant numbers, the old consensus cannot be restored in its previous form. Institutions may continue to claim authority, but they must now do so against visible Jewish dissent. Politicians may continue to speak of Jewish support for Israel, but they must now confront Jewish opposition. Media outlets may continue to quote establishment organizations, but they can no longer pretend those organizations exhaust Jewish opinion. The symbolic monopoly is broken.

The battle over who speaks as a Jew will continue because it concerns the future of Jewish identity itself. If Zionist institutions retain control, Jewish public life will remain organized around Israel, security, and the defense of state legitimacy. If anti-Zionist witness grows, Jewish identity may become more diasporic, ethical, plural, and openly divided. The outcome is uncertain, but the rupture has already changed the field.

Anti-Zionist Jews stand as witnesses against the claim that Jewish survival requires Zionist power. They insist that Jewish life can be faithful without sovereignty, safe without domination, and morally serious without communal obedience. Whether one agrees with them or not, their witness has made one fact undeniable: no institution can honestly speak of "the Jews" as if the argument is over. The argument has only begun.

**9. Anti-Zionism, Antisemitism, and the Crisis of Definition**

The conflict over anti-Zionism and antisemitism is one of the most consequential definitional struggles in contemporary political life. It shapes university policy, media language, protest rights, political campaigns, employment decisions, synagogue debates, donor pressure, civil rights enforcement, and the moral legitimacy of Palestinian solidarity. It also cuts directly through American Jewish life. The question is not abstract. If anti-Zionism is defined as antisemitism, then Jewish anti-Zionists become paradoxical figures: Jews accused of hatred against Jews because they reject a modern political movement that claims to represent Jewish survival. If anti-Zionism is never allowed to overlap with antisemitism, then real hostility to Jews may hide behind the language of Palestine. Both errors are dangerous.

The crisis of definition exists because the categories involved are historically related but not identical. Judaism is a religious, cultural, ethnic, textual, ritual, historical, and civilizational tradition. Jews are a people with many forms of identity and belonging. Zionism is a modern nationalist movement that sought Jewish self-determination in the land of Israel and produced the State of Israel. Israel is a sovereign state with citizens, borders, laws, military power, political parties, intelligence services, courts, prisons, minorities, occupied subjects, and alliances. These categories overlap in lived experience, but they cannot be collapsed into one another without distorting reality.

Antisemitism is hatred, suspicion, demonization, exclusion, or violence directed at Jews as Jews. It may appear in religious, racial, economic, political, conspiratorial, cultural, or nationalist forms. It may accuse Jews of killing Christ, corrupting nations, controlling banks, controlling media, inventing communism, inventing capitalism, poisoning culture, manipulating wars, fabricating suffering, or acting as a hidden collective power. Antisemitism does not disappear merely because it attaches itself to a political issue. It can enter anti-Israel discourse when Jews as a people are collectively blamed, when Jewish identity is treated as inherently suspect, when classic conspiracy myths are recycled in anti-Zionist language, or when Israeli crimes are used to justify hostility toward Jews everywhere.

Anti-Zionism, by contrast, is opposition to Zionism as an ideology or political project. It may arise from many sources: religious Jewish objection to sovereignty before redemption, socialist diasporism, liberal universalism, Palestinian nationalism, anti-colonial politics, human rights analysis, anti-imperialism, or moral opposition to ethnonational statehood. Anti-Zionism may be Jewish, Palestinian, Christian, Muslim, secular, conservative, socialist, anarchist, or nationalist. It can be expressed ethically or unethically, carefully or recklessly, truthfully or falsely. It is not inherently antisemitic, but it can be articulated in antisemitic ways.

This distinction is essential because public debate often rewards collapse. Defenders of Israel may benefit from defining anti-Zionism as antisemitism because doing so delegitimizes opposition to Zionism and places Palestinian solidarity under suspicion. Antisemites may benefit from defining anti-Zionism so loosely that they can attack Jews while claiming only to oppose Israel. The first move protects state power by invoking Jewish vulnerability. The second exploits Palestinian suffering as cover for hatred of Jews. A serious analysis must reject both.

The crisis is intensified by the fact that Israel itself claims to represent Jews globally. When Israeli officials describe Israel as the state of the Jewish people, and when many diaspora institutions echo that claim, criticism of Israel becomes entangled with Jewish identity whether critics want that or not. Anti-Zionist Jews reject this entanglement. They argue that Israel's claim to act in the name of all Jews endangers Jews by making them symbolically responsible for state actions they may oppose. In their view, one of the ethical tasks of anti-Zionism is to separate Jews from the Israeli state.

But separation is difficult because Zionism has succeeded institutionally, emotionally, and pedagogically in linking Israel to Jewish survival. For many Jews, anti-Zionism sounds not like a critique of a political ideology but like a threat to refuge, memory, and collective existence. This fear cannot simply be dismissed as manipulation. It arises from real history. Jews have been expelled, massacred, ghettoized, racialized, converted by force, excluded from professions, demonized in theology, blamed for social crises, and exterminated in the Holocaust. The Jewish fear of vulnerability is not imaginary.

Yet real vulnerability does not settle the political question. A people's trauma does not make its state immune from criticism. A history of persecution does not justify permanent domination over another people. The memory of antisemitism must protect Jews from hatred, not protect Zionism from moral accountability. The challenge is to hold two truths simultaneously: antisemitism is real and dangerous, and accusations of antisemitism can be misused to silence legitimate criticism of Israel and Zionism.

The current struggle over definition is therefore a struggle over moral authority. Whoever controls the meaning of antisemitism controls the boundaries of acceptable speech about Israel. Whoever controls those boundaries controls the public legitimacy of Palestinian solidarity, Jewish dissent, campus activism, journalism, and foreign policy criticism. This is why the definition debate has become so fierce. It is not merely about words. It is about power, protection, punishment, and who is allowed to speak.

### 9.1 The Weaponization and Misuse of Antisemitism Accusations

The weaponization of antisemitism accusations occurs when the charge of antisemitism is used not primarily to protect Jews from hatred, but to protect Israel, Zionism, or pro-Israel

institutions from criticism. This misuse is dangerous because it harms Palestinians, silences dissent, damages democratic debate, and weakens the fight against real antisemitism. When a serious moral category is stretched to cover too many political disagreements, it loses precision. If every sharp criticism of Israel is treated as antisemitism, then actual antisemitism becomes harder to identify and confront.

Weaponization often works by collapsing distinctions. Criticism of Israeli military action becomes hostility to Jews. Opposition to Zionism becomes denial of Jewish existence. Support for boycott becomes discrimination against Jews. Palestinian anger becomes genocidal intent. University protest becomes antisemitic threat. Jewish anti-Zionism becomes self-hatred. These collapses are rhetorically effective because they invoke real Jewish fear. But they are analytically defective. They move too quickly from political critique to ethnic hatred without examining the content, target, language, and context of the speech.

This does not mean that criticism of Israel is always innocent. Some criticism does cross into antisemitism. But the existence of that possibility cannot justify treating all anti-Zionist speech as suspect. Analytical discipline requires asking specific questions. Is the speaker criticizing a state, a government, an army, a movement, or Jews as Jews? Is the language using classic antisemitic tropes? Is collective guilt being assigned to all Jews? Are Jews outside Israel being held responsible for Israeli actions? Is Jewish suffering being denied or mocked? Is Israeli wrongdoing being exaggerated into a cosmic theory of Jewish evil? These questions are more useful than automatic accusation.

The misuse of antisemitism accusations is especially powerful in institutions dependent on money, reputation, and political approval. Universities, museums, media organizations, nonprofits, and politicians may fear being labeled antisemitic more than they fear suppressing legitimate speech. Donors and advocacy groups understand this. A well-timed accusation can trigger investigations, resignations, canceled events, revised policies, disciplinary proceedings, or public apologies. Even when the accusation is weak, the reputational cost can be severe. The result is anticipatory obedience: institutions restrict speech before pressure even arrives.

This anticipatory obedience is visible in campus politics. Students advocating for Palestine may find their speech monitored, their slogans interpreted in the harshest possible light, their organizations investigated, and their events treated as security threats. Jewish anti-Zionist students may be told that their own political commitments make other Jewish students unsafe. Palestinian students may be asked to prove repeatedly that their grief is not hatred. Muslim and Arab students may be scrutinized in ways that pro-Israel students are not. The charge of antisemitism becomes a tool of administrative control.

Media discourse is similarly affected. Journalists may hesitate to use terms such as apartheid, ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism, genocide, occupation, or siege because those terms provoke accusations. Editors may prefer passive constructions that obscure responsibility. Politicians may speak of tragedy rather than policy, humanitarian concern rather than accountability, and complexity rather than power. The fear of accusation shapes language before readers ever encounter it. Weaponization therefore operates not only by punishing speech but by narrowing the vocabulary of moral perception.

The misuse of antisemitism accusations also fractures Jewish life. Jews who oppose Zionism are often placed in an impossible position. If they speak as Jews against Israel, they may be accused of providing cover for antisemites. If they refuse to speak, their Jewish identity may be used by others to justify policies they oppose. If they insist that anti-Zionism is Jewishly legitimate, they may be told they are endangering Jews. This pressure aims to force dissenting Jews back into communal discipline. Its effect, however, is often the opposite. It convinces many Jews that institutional concern about antisemitism has become entangled with protection of state violence.

The weaponization problem is especially severe because it exploits the sacredness of Jewish suffering. The Holocaust, pogroms, expulsions, and centuries of persecution are invoked to create moral urgency around Jewish safety. That urgency is legitimate when Jews are threatened. But when it is used to deflect attention from Palestinian suffering, it becomes a form of moral extortion. It asks the public to treat Jewish fear as decisive even when Palestinians are dying, displaced, occupied, or imprisoned. It converts memory into a shield for power.

This conversion harms Jewish memory itself. If Holocaust memory is repeatedly used to defend or excuse Israeli violence, then many observers will begin to associate Jewish memory with political manipulation. That is dangerous for Jews. The integrity of Holocaust memory depends on refusing to instrumentalize it. The memory of Jewish catastrophe should sharpen moral perception, not dull it. It should help identify dehumanization, not protect one state from accountability.

Weaponization also encourages cynicism. When people see accusations of antisemitism used against obviously non-antisemitic criticism, they may begin to dismiss all accusations. This creates danger for Jews facing real hatred. The boy who cried wolf problem is not a trivial concern. If the term antisemitism is stretched beyond recognition, the public may become less responsive when genuine antisemitism appears. Those who misuse the term therefore endanger the very people they claim to protect.

At the same time, critics of weaponization must be careful. The fact that some accusations are misused does not mean all accusations are false. The language of weaponization can itself become a way to dismiss Jewish fear too quickly. A disciplined anti-Zionist movement must be willing to hear Jews when they describe real antisemitism, even if it rejects the use of antisemitism accusations as a shield for Israel. The goal is not to invert the problem by assuming bad faith in every Jewish concern. The goal is precision.

Precision requires separating discomfort from danger, criticism from hatred, and political accountability from ethnic demonization. A pro-Israel student may feel discomfort when Israel is condemned harshly. That discomfort is not automatically antisemitism. A Jewish student may be harassed with slurs or threats because of being Jewish. That is antisemitism. A protest may call for ending U.S. aid to Israel. That is political speech. A protest may accuse Jews as a people of controlling the government. That is antisemitism. A speaker may call Zionism racist. That is a political judgment. A speaker may say Jews are inherently racist. That is antisemitism.

Such distinctions are not difficult in principle, but they are difficult in practice because political actors benefit from confusion. The current crisis of definition is sustained by those benefits. Pro-Israel institutions benefit when anti-Zionism is stigmatized. Antisemites benefit when Jewish fear is dismissed as bad faith. Politicians benefit when complex moral questions are reduced to loyalty tests. Media benefit when controversy replaces analysis. Universities benefit when safety language allows them to avoid taking principled stands on speech.

The weaponization of antisemitism accusations is therefore not merely a rhetorical problem. It is a structural problem in American public life. It reveals how vulnerability can be converted into authority, how moral memory can be used to discipline debate, and how a legitimate concern for Jewish safety can be entangled with the defense of state power. Jewish anti-Zionists are central to exposing this problem because they cannot easily be dismissed as outsiders hostile to Jews. Their dissent forces the question: if Jews themselves reject Zionism, on what grounds can anti-Zionism be declared inherently anti-Jewish?

### 9.2 Real Antisemitism and the Need for Analytical Discipline

A serious critique of the weaponization of antisemitism accusations must be matched by an equally serious recognition of real antisemitism. Antisemitism is not imaginary, obsolete, or merely a rhetorical invention of pro-Israel institutions. It is a durable and adaptable form of hatred. It has survived religious transformation, secularization, nationalism, capitalism, socialism, fascism, liberalism, and digital media. It can appear on the right, on the left, in religious movements, in nationalist movements, in conspiracy subcultures, in elite spaces, and in street politics. It changes vocabulary, but its core patterns endure.

Real antisemitism often treats Jews as a hidden collective power. It imagines Jews as uniquely manipulative, rootless, disloyal, parasitic, conspiratorial, or cosmopolitan. It blames Jews for social crisis. It projects onto Jews the anxieties of a society: money, media, sexuality, revolution, war, secularism, modernity, globalization, migration, disease, or moral decay. It turns Jews into an explanatory device for a world that feels disordered. This is why antisemitism is so dangerous. It does not merely dislike Jews. It makes Jews symbolically responsible for history's frustrations.

In the context of Israel-Palestine, antisemitism can enter through several pathways. The first is collective blame. Jews everywhere may be held responsible for the actions of Israel, even when they are not Israeli, do not support Israel, or actively oppose Zionism. Synagogues, Jewish schools, Jewish businesses, or visibly Jewish people may be targeted because of anger at Israel. This is antisemitism. No state action justifies attacking or intimidating Jews as Jews.

The second pathway is conspiratorial explanation. Criticism of lobbying, donor influence, media framing, or political pressure can be legitimate when specific, evidence-based, and institutionally grounded. It becomes antisemitic when it turns into a theory of secret Jewish control. There is a crucial difference between analyzing named organizations, public funding, documented lobbying, and political influence, and claiming that "the Jews" control governments, banks, media, or wars. The first can be political analysis. The second is an antisemitic myth.

The third pathway is Holocaust distortion or denial. Some anti-Israel rhetoric minimizes, mocks, instrumentalizes, or denies Jewish catastrophe. This is antisemitic and morally corrupt. Criticism of Israel does not require diminishing the Holocaust. In fact, anti-Zionist Jews often insist that Holocaust memory must be preserved from political misuse precisely because the event is real and sacred in historical memory. Denial or mockery of Jewish suffering is not solidarity with Palestinians. It is hatred.

The fourth pathway is demonization of Jewish identity itself. A movement crosses into antisemitism when it treats Jewish religious symbols, Jewish communal life, Hebrew language, Jewish mourning, or Jewish historical memory as inherently suspect. Opposition to Zionism must not become contempt for Jewishness. A synagogue is not an embassy. A Jew wearing religious clothing is not a representative of the Israeli state. A Jewish holiday is not a political crime. The distinction between Jews and Israel must be lived, not merely asserted.

The fifth pathway is selective moral obsession that uses Israel as a proxy for hatred of Jews. This is difficult to identify because states should be criticized even when criticism is intense. Israel's actions deserve scrutiny, especially given U.S. support and Palestinian suffering. But when Israel is treated as uniquely demonic in a way that borrows older images of Jewish evil, or when all

other political concerns vanish into a cosmic fixation on Jewish power, antisemitic patterns may be present. Analytical discipline requires attention to language, proportionality, and symbolic structure without using those concerns to shield Israel from legitimate accountability.

Anti-Zionist movements must take these dangers seriously not because Zionist institutions demand it, but because ethical politics demands it. A movement for Palestinian liberation cannot be built on hatred of Jews. Such hatred is morally wrong and strategically destructive. It alienates potential allies, endangers Jewish communities, corrupts analysis, and gives pro-Israel institutions real examples with which to discredit the broader movement. If anti-Zionism is to be morally serious, it must actively reject antisemitism rather than merely deny association with it.

Jewish anti-Zionists have a special role in this discipline, but they cannot bear the burden alone. It is not enough to place a few Jewish speakers at the front of a protest and assume antisemitism has been solved. Non-Jewish activists must learn the history and structure of antisemitism. Palestinian solidarity movements must distinguish between Zionist institutions and Jews as Jews. Anti-imperialists must avoid conspiratorial shortcuts. Critics of lobbying must name organizations and mechanisms, not invoke hidden ethnic power. Religious critics must avoid demonizing Judaism. Secular critics must avoid contempt for Jewish peoplehood.

At the same time, analytical discipline must be reciprocal. Pro-Israel institutions must stop treating Palestinian anger as automatically antisemitic. They must distinguish between hatred of Jews and rage against occupation, bombardment, displacement, imprisonment, and apartheid-like conditions. They must recognize that oppressed people may use harsh language against a state that has harmed them. Not all harsh language is hatred of Jews. Not all slogans mean what opponents say they mean. Not every demand for liberation is a call for Jewish death. Precision is required on both sides.

The need for discipline is greatest in moments of war. War produces grief, fear, rage, propaganda, simplification, and moral panic. It becomes easier to dehumanize. It becomes easier to speak collectively. It becomes easier to treat civilians as symbols of enemy power. Jewish civilians become symbols of Israel. Palestinian civilians become symbols of Hamas. Israelis become settlers. Palestinians become terrorists. Such symbolic compression is deadly. Ethical speech must resist it.

A disciplined framework would begin with several principles. Jews are not identical with Israel. Palestinians are not identical with armed factions. Zionism is not identical with Judaism. Criticism of Zionism is not inherently antisemitic. Antisemitism can appear in anti-Zionist spaces. Jewish fear is real. Palestinian suffering is real. State violence must be judged. Civilian life must not be made conditional on political identity. Historical trauma must not be used as permanent immunity from accountability.

Such principles do not solve the conflict, but they protect moral analysis from collapse. They allow criticism of Israel to remain forceful without becoming hatred of Jews. They allow Jews to name antisemitism without using the accusation to silence every critic. They allow Palestinians to speak of dispossession without being forced to flatter the ideology that dispossessed them. They allow Jewish anti-Zionists to occupy a morally coherent position: against antisemitism, against Zionism, against state violence, and against the misuse of Jewish memory.

Analytical discipline is not moderation in the weak sense. It does not require soft language or false equivalence. It requires accuracy. One can condemn Israeli policy with severity and still avoid antisemitism. One can condemn antisemitism with severity and still oppose Zionism. One can defend Jewish safety and Palestinian liberation at the same time. In fact, a serious anti-Zionist Jewish politics must insist that these commitments belong together.

The crisis of definition will continue because the incentives for confusion are powerful. But confusion is not inevitable. It can be resisted by careful language, historical knowledge, moral consistency, and refusal of collective blame. The fight against antisemitism must be preserved from political exploitation, and the fight for Palestinian freedom must be preserved from anti-Jewish hatred. Neither struggle can remain ethical if it corrupts the other.

**9.3 Separating Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and the Israeli State**

The most important intellectual task in this debate is separating Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and the Israeli state without denying the real historical relationships among them. These categories are connected, but they are not the same. Confusing them produces bad history, bad politics, and moral danger. It allows defenders of Israel to present criticism of a state as hatred of a people. It allows antisemites to blame Jews for Israeli actions. It traps diaspora Jews inside a political identity they may reject. It also prevents Palestinians from naming the structure of their oppression clearly.

Jews are a people with multiple forms of belonging. Jewish identity may be religious, ethnic, cultural, familial, historical, linguistic, national, secular, spiritual, or some combination of these. Some Jews are devoutly religious. Some are atheists. Some are Zionists. Some are anti-Zionists. Some feel deep attachment to Israel. Some feel alienated from it. Some define Jewishness through Torah, some through memory, some through family, some through culture, some through ethics, some through peoplehood, and some through opposition to antisemitism. No state or institution can exhaust this diversity.

Judaism is older than Zionism and cannot be reduced to it. Judaism includes scripture, rabbinic debate, law, prayer, ritual, commentary, holidays, ethics, mysticism, philosophy, family life, languages, communal memory, and argument across centuries. The land of Israel is central to Jewish tradition, but centrality is not identical with modern state sovereignty. Prayers for Zion,

longing for Jerusalem, and attachment to biblical geography do not automatically settle questions about nationalism, citizenship, borders, military occupation, or Palestinian rights. To say this is not to deny Jewish attachment to the land. It is to deny that such attachment mandates one modern political form.

Zionism is a modern movement that emerged in response to Jewish vulnerability, European nationalism, antisemitism, and the crisis of emancipation. It sought to normalize Jewish peoplehood through political sovereignty. Zionism itself has had many forms: political, labor, revisionist, religious, cultural, liberal, messianic, socialist, and nationalist. Some forms emphasized refuge, others renewal, others state power, others settlement, others spiritual culture. But all forms confronted the same central problem: how to establish Jewish collective self-determination in a land already inhabited by another people. Anti-Zionism focuses on this problem.

The Israeli state is a state. It has institutions, laws, military power, intelligence agencies, prisons, borders, economic interests, political parties, courts, propaganda, and alliances. It acts in the world like other states, even when it invokes Jewish history. It must therefore be judged as a state. Its Jewish symbolism does not place it beyond political morality. Its claim to represent Jewish survival does not exempt it from scrutiny. Its citizens deserve safety, but its government does not deserve immunity.

Separating these categories makes honest speech possible. A person can love Judaism and oppose Zionism. A person can care about Jews and condemn Israel. A person can oppose antisemitism and support Palestinian liberation. A person can recognize Jewish attachment to the land and still reject Jewish supremacy over Palestinians. A person can mourn Israeli civilians and condemn Israeli state violence. A person can oppose Hamas attacks on civilians and oppose the destruction of Gaza. These combinations are not contradictions unless one has already collapsed Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and Israel into a single object.

The collapse of categories benefits state power. If Israel is the state of all Jews, then criticism of Israel can be framed as an attack on Jewish existence. If Zionism is Judaism, then anti-Zionism can be framed as religious hatred. If Jewish safety is Israeli military supremacy, then opposition to Israeli force can be framed as indifference to Jewish survival. Each collapse narrows the space for moral judgment. Each makes Palestinians harder to hear.

The collapse also endangers Jews. When Israel claims to act for all Jews, and when diaspora institutions repeat that claim, Jews everywhere become symbolically associated with Israeli policy. This association feeds antisemitism by making Jews collectively answerable for a state. Anti-Zionist Jews argue that separating Jewish identity from Israel is therefore necessary for Jewish safety as well as Palestinian justice. They do not want synagogues, schools, or Jewish

individuals to be treated as extensions of a foreign state. They want Jews to be free from the representational burden Zionism imposes.

Separation also protects Judaism from being subordinated to nationalism. When Jewish ritual, scripture, holidays, and memory are used primarily to support Israeli legitimacy, Judaism is narrowed. Its ethical and spiritual range is reduced to national solidarity. Anti-Zionist Jews often seek to recover Judaism as a tradition of argument, exile, justice, humility, study, and responsibility to the stranger. They do not deny that Judaism contains particular love for Jews. They deny that particular love must become political domination.

This separation is difficult because for many Jews the categories are emotionally fused. A family member may live in Israel. A Hebrew prayer may evoke Jerusalem. A Holocaust memory may evoke refuge. A childhood trip may evoke belonging. An Israeli song may evoke tears. An attack on Israel may feel like an attack on one's family. These feelings are real. A serious anti-Zionist argument must not mock them. But emotional fusion cannot determine political truth. The fact that Israel feels sacred to many Jews does not make the state sacred in its actions.

A mature public discourse would allow layered speech. It would say that Jewish attachment to Zion is historically real, that Palestinian dispossession is historically real, that antisemitism is real, that Islamophobia and anti-Palestinian racism are real, that Zionism is a political movement subject to critique, that Israel is a state subject to accountability, and that Jews are not collectively responsible for Israel unless they choose to defend its actions. Such a discourse would not satisfy propagandists on either side, because it refuses simple collapse. But it would be more truthful.

The distinction between Judaism and Zionism also opens space for Jewish futures beyond Israel-centered identity. Diaspora Judaism need not be organized around defense of a state. Jewish education need not treat Palestinian history as a threat. Synagogues need not make loyalty to Israel a condition of belonging. Jewish memory need not culminate in military power. Jewish safety need not be imagined only through sovereignty. Jewish ethics need not stop at the border of Jewish interest.

The distinction between Jews and Israel also opens space for non-Jews to criticize Israel responsibly. Non-Jewish critics must learn to say Israel when they mean Israel, Zionism when they mean Zionism, Israeli government when they mean Israeli government, settlers when they mean settlers, soldiers when they mean soldiers, and Jews when they mean Jews. Precision is not politeness. It is moral necessity. Imprecision endangers Jews and weakens Palestinian advocacy.

The distinction between Zionism and Israeli citizens is also necessary. Many Israeli Jews are born into a political reality they did not create. They have fears, families, disagreements, traumas,

and moral conflicts. Some oppose occupation. Some support it. Some are indifferent. Some are racist. Some are anti-racist. Some are soldiers by law. Some refuse service. A critique of Zionism must not erase the humanity or diversity of Israeli Jews. Opposition to a state structure is not a license to dehumanize the people living within it.

The distinction between Palestinian liberation and anti-Jewish hostility is equally necessary. Palestinian freedom must mean freedom from domination, not revenge against Jews. Any future worth defending must protect Jews and Palestinians alike. Anti-Zionism that cannot articulate a future for Jewish safety has an ethical weakness. Zionism that cannot articulate a future for Palestinian equality has a deeper political and moral failure. The challenge is to imagine safety without supremacy.

Separating Jews, Judaism, Zionism, and Israel does not end the argument. It begins the argument honestly. Once the categories are separated, the real questions can be asked. Can a Jewish state exist without Palestinian subordination? Can diaspora Jews flourish without Zionism? Can Jewish memory support universal justice rather than nationalist discipline? Can American institutions protect Jews from antisemitism without suppressing Palestine advocacy? Can Palestinians be free without Jews becoming unsafe? Can Jewish identity survive the collapse of the Zionist consensus?

These questions define the future of the debate. The old consensus avoided them by fusing categories. The new Jewish anti-Zionist movement forces them into the open by separating what had been joined. That separation is not an attack on Jews. It is an attempt to rescue Jewish life from compulsory identification with state power and to make Palestinian life visible outside the shadow of Jewish fear.

**10. U.S. Foreign Policy, Donor Power, and the Israel Lobby**

The Jewish anti-Zionist rupture in New York cannot be understood only as a religious, generational, or communal dispute. It is also a conflict over American power. Israel is not merely an object of Jewish attachment or theological argument. It is a strategic ally of the United States, a major recipient of American military aid, a partner in intelligence and security systems, a subject of congressional protection, and a central symbol in domestic political alignment. American support for Israel is sustained through overlapping forces: strategic calculation, evangelical theology, defense industry interests, lobbying, donor networks, media narratives, bipartisan habits, and the moral authority attached to Jewish historical suffering. Jewish anti-Zionism threatens this structure because it weakens one of its most important symbolic supports: the claim that support for Israel is support for the Jewish people.

The term “Israel lobby” must be used carefully. It should not be a coded phrase for Jews, Jewish power, or hidden control. Such claims belong to antisemitic conspiracy thinking and must be rejected. The Israel lobby is better understood as a set of identifiable institutions, donors, advocacy groups, political action networks, think tanks, media campaigns, evangelical organizations, defense interests, foreign-policy professionals, and ideological actors that work to preserve U.S. support for Israel. Some of these actors are Jewish. Many are not. Some are motivated by Jewish communal concern. Others are motivated by Christian Zionist theology, geopolitical strategy, anti-Iran policy, defense contracting, partisan advantage, Islamophobia, or broader imperial commitments. The lobby is not a secret ethnic cabal. It is a public political formation operating within the ordinary, highly unequal machinery of American influence.

This distinction matters because anti-Zionist analysis must name power without reproducing antisemitic mythology. It is legitimate to examine lobbying, campaign finance, donor pressure, political endorsements, think tank networks, media discipline, and institutional intimidation. It is not legitimate to convert those mechanisms into claims about Jews as a people. The purpose of serious analysis is precision. Zionist power in the United States is real, but it is institutional, political, financial, ideological, and imperial; it is not mystical, racial, or collective in the antisemitic sense. To criticize that power responsibly is to identify actors, incentives, documents, policies, and consequences.

Jewish anti-Zionists are especially important in this terrain because they disrupt the moral cover that pro-Israel politics often receives. When politicians support unconditional military aid to Israel, they frequently present that support as solidarity with Jews. When universities restrict Palestine activism, they often say they are protecting Jewish students. When donors pressure institutions, they may frame the pressure as defense of Jewish safety. When advocacy groups attack critics of Israel, they often invoke the fight against antisemitism. Jewish anti-Zionists challenge the chain of equivalence. They say: not all Jews support this; not all Jewish safety depends on Israeli power; not all criticism of Israel is antisemitism; not all institutions claiming to defend Jews speak for Jews.

This rupture has foreign-policy consequences. American support for Israel has long depended on a bipartisan assumption that defending Israel is politically safe and morally elevated. That assumption becomes less stable when Jewish dissent becomes visible, organized, and impossible to dismiss. If anti-Zionist Jews are present in protests, universities, synagogues, media, and electoral coalitions, then politicians can no longer claim that Jewish opinion is identical with pro-Israel policy. This does not by itself overturn the alliance. The United States has many reasons for supporting Israel beyond Jewish communal pressure. But Jewish anti-Zionism changes the domestic legitimacy environment. It makes support for Israel look less like automatic defense of a vulnerable minority and more like a contested policy choice.

The result is a struggle over the meaning of American democracy itself. Who gets to shape foreign policy? Voters or donors? Public debate or lobbying discipline? Human rights law or strategic exception? Jewish institutions or Jewish pluralism? Palestinian testimony or security narratives? Universities or political committees? The Israel-Palestine debate has become a revealing case study in how American power works. It shows how moral language, identity protection, campaign finance, media pressure, and imperial strategy can converge to narrow the range of permissible policy.

**10.1 American Empire and Israeli Strategic Utility**

The U.S.-Israel relationship is often discussed in moral and historical language: shared values, democracy, refuge, memory, security, terrorism, and the lessons of Jewish persecution. These themes matter in American public rhetoric, but they do not exhaust the relationship. Israel also has strategic utility for the United States. It functions as a heavily armed regional ally, an intelligence partner, a military technology collaborator, a counterweight to hostile or independent regional powers, and a stable node of American influence in the Middle East. To understand U.S. support for Israel, one must examine not only Jewish history but also American empire.

The word “empire” is often resisted in American discourse because the United States prefers to describe itself as a democracy with interests, alliances, and values rather than as an empire. Yet the structure of American power is global: military bases, sanctions regimes, weapons sales, intelligence partnerships, naval dominance, dollar power, diplomatic pressure, and alliance systems. In that structure, Israel occupies a special place. It is not simply a client state, nor is it simply an independent ally. It is a state whose regional military strength serves American interests even when specific Israeli actions complicate American diplomacy.

Israel’s strategic utility has several dimensions. First, it provides the United States with a reliable military and intelligence partner in a region central to energy, trade routes, geopolitical rivalry, and imperial management. Second, Israel helps contain or pressure states and movements viewed as hostile to American regional dominance. Third, Israel serves as a testing ground and collaborator in surveillance, counterinsurgency, border technology, missile defense, drone warfare, cyber capabilities, and urban warfare doctrine. Fourth, Israel’s conflicts help sustain a political economy of weapons production, military aid, and security cooperation. Fifth, Israel functions ideologically as a Western-aligned outpost in a region often racialized, Orientalized, or framed through terrorism discourse.

These strategic functions do not mean that Israel merely obeys Washington. The relationship is more complex. Israel has its own political class, ideological currents, military doctrine, regional ambitions, and domestic pressures. It can act in ways that create problems for U.S. policy. It can

drag American leaders into diplomatic crises, embarrass administrations, or constrain regional negotiations. But the alliance endures because the perceived benefits outweigh the costs for powerful sectors of the American state. Israel is valuable not only because of moral sympathy but because it is useful.

This strategic frame helps explain why U.S. support for Israel often survives actions that would damage relations with other states. Civilian casualties, settlement expansion, annexationist rhetoric, religious extremism, human rights criticism, and international legal controversy rarely produce serious American punishment. The reason is not only lobbying. It is also the deeper alignment between Israeli power and American regional strategy. Lobbying is effective partly because it operates within a foreign-policy establishment already inclined to see Israel as an asset.

Jewish anti-Zionism challenges the moral layer of this alliance but must also confront the strategic layer. It is not enough to say that Israel does not represent all Jews. That is true, but American support for Israel would not vanish even if every American Jew became anti-Zionist. The alliance is embedded in military, diplomatic, technological, evangelical, and imperial systems. Jewish anti-Zionism can weaken the moral claim that Israel is defended in the name of Jewish safety, but it must join broader antiwar and anti-imperial movements to challenge the strategic architecture.

This is why coalitions matter. Palestinian liberation activism, Jewish anti-Zionism, antiwar politics, civil liberties advocacy, Muslim and Arab American organizing, Black radical traditions, student movements, and critics of militarism all converge around the question of U.S. power. Israel-Palestine becomes not only a foreign conflict but a domestic mirror. It reveals how the United States funds war, disciplines dissent, militarizes police, surveils minorities, manages media narratives, and protects allies from accountability. Jewish anti-Zionism becomes stronger when it understands itself as part of this larger struggle rather than merely as an internal Jewish ethical correction.

The strategic utility of Israel also explains why liberal appeals often fail. Many critics have argued for decades that Israel should change because occupation harms democracy, damages America's reputation, fuels extremism, or violates human rights. These arguments may be morally strong, but they often underestimate how useful a militarized Israel is to American power. A state that occupies, surveils, contains, and strikes may be morally troubling but strategically valuable. From the perspective of empire, domination is not always a failure. Sometimes it is the function.

This point is difficult but necessary. If Israel's role in American policy is partly to project force, then asking Israel to behave like a neutral liberal democracy misunderstands why the alliance is

protected. The United States does not support Israel only because Israel is said to share values. It supports Israel because Israel shares enemies, methods, technologies, and strategic objectives. The language of shared values often sanitizes the deeper reality of shared power.

Jewish anti-Zionists therefore face a double task. They must argue within Jewish life that Judaism does not require Zionism, and they must argue within American politics that U.S. support for Israel is part of a broader system of militarized domination. The first argument breaks communal discipline. The second confronts the state. Both are necessary because Zionism survives in America through both Jewish identity and American empire.

**10.2 Lobbying, Elections, and the Policing of Dissent**

Lobbying is one of the most visible mechanisms by which support for Israel is maintained in American politics. It operates through campaign contributions, endorsements, scorecards, direct advocacy, legislative drafting, donor coordination, political education, media pressure, candidate recruitment, and the threat of electoral punishment. None of this is unique to Israel advocacy. American politics is saturated with organized influence: oil, pharmaceuticals, defense, finance, technology, unions, real estate, agriculture, and many other interests operate through similar mechanisms. What makes Israel advocacy distinctive is the moral shield created by Jewish vulnerability and the accusation that opposition may reflect antisemitism.

Electoral politics rewards discipline. A politician who challenges Israel policy may face donor backlash, negative advertising, primary challenges, media scrutiny, accusations of extremism, or loss of institutional support. A politician who supports Israel rarely faces equivalent establishment punishment. This asymmetry shapes behavior. Many elected officials learn that strong support for Israel is safe, while criticism is risky. The result is a political class that may privately express concern but publicly repeats established formulas.

The policing of dissent is not only punitive. It is also anticipatory. Candidates know which positions are dangerous before anyone threatens them. Staffers know which language to avoid. Universities know which donor reactions to fear. Journalists know which claims require extra caution. Nonprofits know which funders may object. This anticipatory discipline is more powerful than direct censorship because it becomes internalized. People censor themselves to avoid conflict, career damage, or reputational risk.

Israel advocacy organizations often present their work as ordinary democratic participation, and in formal terms much of it is. Citizens and organizations have the right to lobby. Donors have the right to support candidates. Advocacy groups have the right to argue for policies. The democratic problem is not the existence of advocacy. The problem is disproportionate influence, lack of transparency, ideological narrowing, and the use of antisemitism accusations

to delegitimize opposing speech. When a foreign-policy position becomes insulated from democratic challenge, lobbying becomes more than advocacy. It becomes discipline.

The policing of dissent is particularly visible in congressional politics. Candidates who criticize Israeli policy may be asked to prove their opposition to antisemitism in ways that supporters of Israel are not asked to prove concern for Palestinians. Calls for conditioning aid, supporting ceasefire, or investigating war crimes can be framed as radical, while votes for weapons are treated as normal. The moral burden falls asymmetrically. The critic must explain. The supporter need only invoke alliance, security, and shared values.

Donor power intensifies this asymmetry. Wealthy donors can shape political incentives far beyond their numbers. They can fund challengers, reward loyal candidates, influence party leadership, support think tanks, sponsor trips, fund media campaigns, and pressure universities. Again, this is not unique to pro-Israel politics. It is a general pathology of American democracy. But in the Israel-Palestine context, donor power often operates behind the language of communal safety. A donor may pressure an institution not only as a political actor but as a supposed defender of Jews. This gives financial influence moral elevation.

Jewish anti-Zionists challenge this arrangement by exposing the gap between donor politics and Jewish pluralism. They argue that wealthy pro-Israel donors do not speak for all Jews, that institutional pressure does not equal communal consensus, and that criticism of donor influence is not antisemitic when it names specific actors and mechanisms. This last point is crucial. It is possible to criticize donor power responsibly. The responsible critique identifies institutions, money flows, political strategies, and public consequences. It does not attribute hidden control to Jews as a people.

The policing of dissent also extends to language. Terms such as apartheid, genocide, ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism, and boycott are often treated as inflammatory or antisemitic when applied to Israel. Yet these terms are part of international political and legal discourse. They may be debated, supported, rejected, or qualified, but banning them from discussion prevents serious analysis. Language policing protects the state by making certain conclusions unsayable before evidence is considered.

Boycott politics is especially revealing. Boycott is a nonviolent tactic used in many struggles. In the Israel-Palestine context, however, support for boycott is often framed as uniquely discriminatory. Critics argue that boycotting Israel unfairly singles out the Jewish state or targets Jews collectively. Supporters argue that boycott targets institutions complicit in occupation and apartheid-like conditions, not Jews as Jews. The dispute is not merely over tactics but over whether Palestinians and their allies are allowed to use nonviolent pressure against a state

protected by U.S. power. Jewish anti-Zionist support for boycott complicates the accusation that boycott is inherently anti-Jewish.

Universities have become major sites of dissent policing because they combine student activism, donor influence, public controversy, and administrative vulnerability. Pro-Palestinian student groups may face surveillance, suspension, disciplinary charges, or accusations of creating unsafe environments. Jewish anti-Zionist groups may be dismissed as unrepresentative or accused of tokenizing themselves. Faculty may fear professional consequences. Administrators may invoke safety while responding to political pressure. The university becomes a miniature version of the national debate: free speech in principle, Palestine exception in practice.

Media institutions participate in policing by deciding which voices are credible. Establishment pro-Israel voices are often treated as responsible representatives of Jewish concern, while anti-Zionist voices may be framed as controversial, radical, or fringe. Palestinian voices may be required to condemn violence before speaking, while Israeli officials may be allowed to frame military action as self-defense without equivalent interrogation. These patterns are changing under pressure, but they remain important. The policing of dissent is not only about who may speak. It is about who is presumed reasonable when they do.

Elections, lobbying, and media discipline reinforce one another. Politicians echo narratives that advocacy groups promote. Media quote politicians and advocacy groups as authorities. Donors reward politicians who stay within the boundaries. Universities react to the resulting pressure. Activists are then portrayed as disruptive for challenging a consensus that was never democratically neutral. This circular process produces the appearance of broad agreement.

Jewish anti-Zionist dissent breaks the circle by refusing the representational claim. It tells politicians that support for Israel cannot be justified simply by invoking Jews. It tells universities that Jewish safety cannot mean censorship of Palestine advocacy. It tells media that Jewish opinion is divided. It tells donors that their money cannot purchase moral authority. It tells advocacy organizations that they do not own Jewish identity. This is why the movement is so threatening. It attacks not only policy but the legitimacy structure that protects policy from democratic contest.

### 10.3 Why Jewish Anti-Zionism Threatens More Than Theology

Jewish anti-Zionism threatens more than theology because Zionism in America is not merely a religious or ethnic attachment. It is part of a political system. It supports foreign policy, donor networks, electoral discipline, institutional legitimacy, media framing, university governance, defense spending, and American imperial strategy. When Jews publicly reject Zionism, they do not simply reinterpret Judaism. They weaken a major symbolic foundation of U.S.-Israel politics.

The threat begins with representation. Pro-Israel politics often depends on the claim that Israel represents Jewish collective interest. This claim allows support for Israel to be framed as protection of Jews. It gives politicians moral cover. It gives donors communal authority. It gives advocacy groups legitimacy. It gives universities a rationale for restricting Palestine activism. It gives media a familiar interpretive frame. Jewish anti-Zionism disrupts that entire structure by saying: Israel does not represent us; Zionism does not define us; Jewish safety is not the same as Israeli power.

This disruption has practical consequences. If Jewish opinion is visibly divided, politicians have more room to criticize Israel without appearing anti-Jewish. If Jewish students oppose Zionism, universities cannot honestly define all anti-Zionist activism as a threat to Jewish students. If rabbis call for ceasefire or support Palestinian liberation, religious authority becomes plural. If Jewish journalists expose Israel advocacy networks, media narratives become harder to control. If Jewish donors support anti-occupation or anti-Zionist causes, philanthropic legitimacy shifts. Each development weakens the old monopoly.

Jewish anti-Zionism also threatens the emotional economy of American support for Israel. For decades, Jewish vulnerability has been one of the most powerful moral resources in American politics. The memory of persecution, especially the Holocaust, gives urgency to Jewish security claims. This memory should be honored and protected. But when it is attached to Israeli state power, it can produce moral deference. Jewish anti-Zionists challenge that deference by arguing that the memory of Jewish vulnerability should create solidarity with Palestinians, not immunity for Israel.

This argument is dangerous to the old consensus because it reverses the moral direction of Jewish memory. Instead of moving from Holocaust to Israel to military defense, it moves from Holocaust to universal vigilance to opposition against state violence. Instead of treating Israel as the answer to Jewish suffering, it asks whether Israel has become an agent of another people's suffering. This reversal threatens not only Zionist theology but the public rituals through which American support for Israel has been sanctified.

Jewish anti-Zionism also threatens American empire because it removes a moral alibi. U.S. support for Israel can be defended in strategic terms, but strategy alone is not morally attractive. It is more persuasive to say that America supports Israel because Jews need safety, democracy needs defense, and history demands solidarity. When Jews themselves reject this framing, the alliance becomes more visibly what it also is: a military and geopolitical relationship. The humanitarian aura weakens. The weapons become more visible.

The movement also threatens bipartisan consensus. Support for Israel has long been one of the few areas of broad agreement across American party lines, though the content and tone of that

support differ between parties and constituencies. Jewish anti-Zionism, especially among younger progressives, creates pressure inside the Democratic coalition. It forces liberal politicians to choose between donor expectations, human rights rhetoric, youth activism, Muslim and Arab American voters, Black and left coalitions, and establishment pro-Israel commitments. This pressure does not yet dominate national policy, but it is growing.

Jewish anti-Zionism also threatens the definition of antisemitism preferred by many pro-Israel institutions. If anti-Zionism is treated as antisemitism, then anti-Zionist Jews become a problem. They cannot be easily explained without pathologizing them. The existence of serious, visible, organized anti-Zionist Jews forces a debate over whether definitions of antisemitism are being used to protect Jews or to protect Zionism. This is one of the most important ideological battles of the present moment.

The movement threatens Jewish institutions themselves because it offers an alternative path to Jewish continuity. For decades, many institutions assumed that Israel education, Israel trips, Israel advocacy, and Israel attachment were necessary to keep younger Jews connected. Anti-Zionist Jewish spaces show that the opposite may now be true for many. Some Jews become more Jewish by breaking with Zionism. They study more, pray more, organize more, build community more, and recover Jewish ethical language more intensely after rejecting Israel-centered identity. This is a profound institutional threat because it means Zionist education may no longer be the only route to Jewish continuity.

Jewish anti-Zionism also threatens donor hierarchies. If legitimacy migrates from wealthy institutional boards to activist networks, rabbis of conscience, student groups, and alternative media, then money loses some of its moral authority. Donors can still influence institutions, but they cannot easily command the loyalty of a generation that sees donor pressure as part of the problem. This shift is especially visible in New York, where donor power and activist visibility confront one another directly.

The movement also threatens the comfort of liberal Zionism. Liberal Zionism has long served as a compromise position for American Jews who want to support Israel while criticizing occupation. Jewish anti-Zionism asks whether that compromise has become untenable. If Israel's Jewish character requires permanent inequality, then liberal Zionism may be a contradiction. If the two-state solution is no longer plausible, then liberal Zionism may be a nostalgia. If occupation is not temporary, then criticism without rupture may be complicity. These questions threaten the emotional center of many American Jewish liberals.

Finally, Jewish anti-Zionism threatens the inherited story of Jewish modernity. Zionism presented itself as the solution to exile, weakness, dependency, and persecution. It promised normalization through sovereignty. Jewish anti-Zionism asks whether that solution has

produced a new crisis: Jewish identity bound to militarism, diaspora institutions bound to state violence, and Palestinian life subordinated to Jewish national repair. This is not a small theological disagreement. It is a challenge to the dominant twentieth-century answer to the Jewish question.

The threat is therefore broad because Zionism became broad. It became religion, memory, identity, philanthropy, foreign policy, electoral discipline, education, and moral language. To reject it is to disturb every institution built around it. That is why Jewish anti-Zionism provokes such fierce reaction. It is not merely another opinion. It is a withdrawal of consent from a system that requires Jewish consent to appear morally legitimate.

The future of this struggle will depend on whether Jewish anti-Zionism remains a dissenting minority, becomes a major current in American Jewish life, or forces a reconfiguration of Zionist institutions themselves. But even now, its effects are visible. It has broken the assumption of unity. It has created alternative Jewish spaces. It has complicated accusations of antisemitism. It has linked Palestine to American empire. It has exposed donor power and lobbying discipline. It has given politicians and activists new language. It has made it possible for Jews to say publicly that Jewish survival does not require Palestinian subordination.

That possibility is the movement's deepest threat. Once Jewish identity is separated from Israeli power, the entire moral architecture of U.S. support for Israel begins to shift. The alliance may remain. The weapons may continue. The lobbying may intensify. The institutions may fight back. But the old claim that Israel speaks for Jewish destiny can no longer pass uncontested. Jewish anti-Zionism has made the contest visible, and visibility is the beginning of political change.

**11. Diaspora Judaism After Zionism**

The crisis of Zionism in American Jewish life is also the possible rebirth of diaspora Judaism as a serious moral, theological, and political form. For much of the postwar period, diaspora was often treated implicitly as incompleteness: safe in America perhaps, prosperous perhaps, culturally rich perhaps, but still secondary to Israel as the supposed center of Jewish destiny. Even when American Jews did not intend to move to Israel, Israel was often presented as the spiritual and political anchor of Jewish continuity. Diaspora Jews could remain where they were, but their collective identity was expected to orbit the Jewish state.

Jewish anti-Zionism challenges this hierarchy. It asks whether diaspora should be understood not as failure, weakness, or delay, but as a valid and possibly superior form of Jewish existence. Diaspora Judaism is not stateless emptiness. It is the historical condition in which most Jewish religious thought, textual interpretation, communal adaptation, ethical reflection, and cultural creativity developed. Rabbinic Judaism itself is largely a civilization of exile, argument,

portability, memory, law, learning, and communal resilience without sovereignty. The synagogue, the study house, the Sabbath table, the commentary tradition, the ethical commandment, and the dispersed community are not substitutes for statehood. They are core Jewish forms.

After Zionism, diaspora Judaism would not mean indifference to Jewish history in the land of Israel. Nor would it require denial of the emotional, religious, and ancestral power of Zion. It would mean refusing to make modern state sovereignty the final measure of Jewish life. It would mean that Jewish peoplehood can be sustained through covenant, memory, language, ritual, learning, kinship, justice, and solidarity rather than through borders, armies, demographic control, and military victory. It would mean that Jewish safety should be pursued through equal rights, alliances, pluralism, anti-racism, democratic protection, and moral credibility, not through domination over Palestinians.

This is not a naïve position if it recognizes danger honestly. Jews have lived through expulsions, pogroms, racial antisemitism, fascism, and genocide. Any post-Zionist diaspora Judaism that ignores Jewish vulnerability will fail. But Zionism's answer to vulnerability is no longer self-evidently adequate. A state can protect some Jews while endangering others. A state can give refuge while producing permanent war. A state can strengthen Jewish bodies while corroding Jewish moral authority. A state can claim to solve exile while making Jewish identity dependent on violence, occupation, and alliance with empire. The question is therefore not whether Jews need safety. They do. The question is whether ethnonational sovereignty has delivered safety in a form compatible with justice.

Diaspora Judaism after Zionism would also require a different relation to Palestinians. Palestinians cannot remain background figures in a Jewish drama of trauma and redemption. They are a people with their own memory, land, grief, dispossession, rights, and political future. A Jewish identity organized after Zionism must place Palestinian humanity at the center of its moral reconstruction. This does not mean replacing Jewish memory with Palestinian memory. It means refusing to build Jewish memory on Palestinian erasure. It means that the future of Jewish ethics depends in part on whether Jews can hear the people whose suffering Zionism has so often minimized.

New York is one of the places where this post-Zionist diaspora Judaism is already taking form. In protests, prayer circles, student groups, alternative congregations, public rituals, writing, journalism, and interfaith coalitions, Jews are experimenting with forms of belonging that do not depend on loyalty to Israel. Some are secular, some religious, some traditional, some radical, some wounded by institutions they once trusted. What unites them is not a complete doctrine but a refusal: Judaism must not be held hostage by state power.

The future remains uncertain. Zionist institutions remain strong. Many Jews remain deeply attached to Israel. Antisemitism is real and may intensify in times of political crisis. Anti-Zionist movements can make errors, tolerate bad rhetoric, or underestimate Jewish fear. Yet the possibility has opened. A Judaism after Zionism is no longer only a theory. It is becoming a lived diaspora practice.

### 11.1 Jewish Safety Without Ethnonational Sovereignty

The strongest argument for Zionism has always been safety. After centuries of persecution and the catastrophe of the Holocaust, the claim that Jews require sovereign power cannot be dismissed lightly. Zionism speaks from a real historical wound: dependence on others has often failed Jews. Liberal promises failed. Christian societies failed. European emancipation failed. International law failed. Borders closed. Neighbors betrayed. Bureaucracies murdered. A serious anti-Zionist Jewish politics must begin by acknowledging that fear rather than mocking it.

But acknowledgment is not surrender. The fact that Jewish fear is historically grounded does not prove that ethnonational sovereignty is the only or best answer. Zionism promised to make Jews safe by making Jews sovereign. It promised that Jews would no longer depend on the mercy of others. Yet the Israeli state has not abolished Jewish fear. It has reorganized it. Israeli Jews live with militarization, conscription, recurring war, hostage trauma, regional hostility, rocket attacks, and the psychological burden of permanent siege mentality. Diaspora Jews are often made symbolically accountable for Israeli actions they do not control. Palestinians live under the direct consequences of Jewish state power. The system produces security for some only through insecurity for others, and even that security remains unstable.

A post-Zionist diaspora Judaism must therefore ask what safety means. Is safety the ability of one people to dominate another? Is safety military superiority? Is safety walls, checkpoints, prisons, surveillance, air power, and demographic law? Or is safety a social condition produced by justice, equal rights, mutual recognition, pluralist institutions, strong protections for minorities, and solidarity across communities? These questions are not sentimental. They go to the heart of political survival. A people that seeks safety through domination may gain force while multiplying enemies. A people that seeks safety through justice may still face danger, but it does not make danger the organizing principle of its identity.

Jewish safety without ethnonational sovereignty would rest on several commitments. First, Jews must be protected wherever they live as equal citizens and as Jews. This requires serious opposition to antisemitism, not rhetorical minimization. Synagogues, schools, cemeteries, visibly Jewish people, and Jewish institutions must be protected from violence, threats, and harassment. Second, Jewish safety must be linked to the safety of other minorities. Jews are most secure in societies where no minority can be easily demonized, surveilled, expelled, or

made collectively guilty. Third, Jewish institutions must build alliances rather than isolation. Safety is not produced by standing apart from Muslims, Arabs, Christians, Black communities, immigrants, secular activists, or other vulnerable groups. It is produced by shared defense of pluralism and equal dignity.

This model differs from Zionist safety because it does not seek refuge in supremacy. It does not say Jews are safe only when Jews control the state. It says Jews are safe when states cannot be captured by ethnic hatred, when rights are not conditional on majority identity, and when communities defend one another against dehumanization. That may appear fragile, but militarized sovereignty is fragile too. No political form abolishes risk. The question is which risks corrupt the soul and which risks preserve moral possibility.

A Jewish safety rooted in diaspora solidarity also requires rejecting the fantasy that isolation protects. Jewish history contains both betrayal and alliance. Non-Jews have persecuted Jews, but non-Jews have also sheltered Jews, fought fascism, opposed antisemitism, joined civil rights struggles, and stood against hatred. Zionist fear often remembers betrayal more vividly than alliance. A post-Zionist diaspora Judaism must remember both. It must be realistic about danger without making suspicion into theology.

Ethnonational sovereignty also creates a problem for Jewish universalism. If the Jewish answer to persecution is a state that privileges Jews over non-Jews, then Jewish safety becomes dependent on inequality. That inequality may be defended as necessary, but necessity is a dangerous moral category when it becomes permanent. Palestinians are then asked to pay indefinitely for Jewish trauma. Their movement, return, citizenship, land, and political rights become subordinate to Jewish demographic security. A Jewish ethics after Zionism must reject the idea that one people's safety can be built on another people's permanent dispossession.

The deeper question is whether Jewish safety can be separated from Jewish innocence. Zionism often presents Jewish power as defensive, reluctant, and forced by history. But power changes those who wield it. A state that imprisons, bombs, occupies, and excludes cannot remain morally innocent because its reasons are rooted in trauma. Diaspora Judaism after Zionism would abandon the need for innocence and accept the harder task of responsibility. Jews are not only victims in history. In the modern world, Jews can also be citizens, soldiers, donors, voters, officials, critics, and agents. Safety must be pursued without denying agency.

This does not mean that Jews should become politically powerless. A post-Zionist model does not ask Jews to disappear into abstraction or rely passively on goodwill. It asks Jews to use power differently. Political organization, legal defense, education, coalition building, journalism, community security, and anti-hate monitoring remain necessary. But these forms of power do not require a Jewish ethnostate. They require democratic strength and moral clarity.

For American Jews, this is especially important. The United States is not free of antisemitism, but American Jews possess significant civil rights, institutional capacity, public voice, and cultural influence. The question is how that power should be used. It can be used to defend Israel unconditionally, discipline dissent, and support policies that harm Palestinians. Or it can be used to build a broader politics of minority protection, antiwar solidarity, civil liberties, and equal rights. Jewish anti-Zionism argues for the second path.

Safety without ethnonational sovereignty is difficult because it offers no final guarantee. But Zionism offers no final guarantee either. The promise of absolute safety is false in every political system. The more honest question is what kind of insecurity Jews can live with without losing their ethical center. Diaspora Judaism has always lived with vulnerability, but it has also produced extraordinary resilience. Its tools were not armies and borders, but learning, adaptation, mutual aid, law, ritual, humor, memory, argument, and community. Those tools are not obsolete. They may be precisely what Jewish life needs after the exhaustion of state-centered nationalism.

**11.2 Memory, Covenant, Exile, and Universal Justice**

A Judaism after Zionism must reconstruct the relationship between memory, covenant, exile, and universal justice. Zionism reorganized Jewish memory around return and sovereignty. It interpreted exile as danger, weakness, humiliation, and abnormality. It interpreted statehood as restoration, agency, and repair. This interpretation drew from real elements of Jewish tradition, but it narrowed the meaning of Jewish history. Exile became a wound to be closed by power, rather than a condition that had generated distinctive Jewish forms of ethical and spiritual life.

Exile in Jewish tradition is not simple. It can be punishment, tragedy, dispersion, longing, danger, and loss. But it is also the condition in which Torah becomes portable, interpretation deepens, community adapts, and identity is sustained without kingship. The Babylonian Talmud, medieval commentary, diasporic liturgy, synagogue life, and countless forms of Jewish learning emerged outside sovereignty. The Jewish people survived not because they always possessed land and force, but because they developed practices of memory and covenant that could travel.

Covenant is therefore more fundamental than statehood. The covenantal imagination binds Jewish life to responsibility, commandment, holiness, memory, and ethical relation. It does not require that Jews be powerless, but neither does it equate power with fulfillment. A state may call itself Jewish, but if it violates justice, humiliates the stranger, crushes the vulnerable, or sanctifies domination, then covenant judges the state. The state does not judge the covenant.

This distinction is crucial. Zionism often treats political sovereignty as the answer to Jewish history. Covenant asks a different question: what does Jewish history require of Jews? If the answer is merely survival, then almost anything can be justified in survival's name. If the answer

is faithfulness, then survival must be held within moral limits. Jewish tradition does not command Jews simply to endure. It commands them to remember, sanctify, argue, repent, repair, and act justly. A Judaism that survives by forgetting justice has not truly survived.

Memory is the arena where this struggle becomes most intense. Holocaust memory has been central to postwar Jewish identity, and rightly so. The destruction of European Jewry must not be minimized, universalized into vagueness, or appropriated casually. But memory can be used in different ways. It can teach vigilance against hatred and state violence, or it can be used to justify permanent suspicion and military supremacy. It can deepen compassion, or it can harden tribal fear. It can open Jews to the suffering of others, or it can make Jewish suffering the only suffering that matters.

A post-Zionist Jewish memory would not weaken Holocaust memory. It would rescue it from state instrumentalization. It would insist that the memory of Jewish catastrophe must never become a warrant for Palestinian catastrophe. It would teach that the lesson of dehumanization is not that Jews alone must never again be victims, but that no people should be rendered disposable. This does not erase Jewish specificity. It gives Jewish specificity ethical force.

The concept of exile can also be recovered as moral discipline. Exile teaches that home cannot be reduced to possession. It teaches that identity can persist without domination. It teaches humility before history. It teaches dependence on law, learning, and community rather than force alone. It teaches that strangers must be remembered because Jews have been strangers. Zionism often viewed exile as shame. A diaspora Judaism after Zionism may view exile as a difficult vocation: not a romantic condition, but a spiritual warning against the intoxication of sovereignty.

Universal justice does not mean Jews must abandon particular Jewish love. Every tradition has its own people, memories, rituals, and obligations. Jewish parents love Jewish children. Jewish communities preserve Jewish texts. Jewish mourning has particular names and faces. Universal justice becomes false when it demands that Jews dissolve into abstract humanity. But particular love becomes corrupt when it denies the humanity of others. The task is not to choose between Jewish particularity and universal justice, but to order them rightly. Jewish particularity must become a path into justice, not an exemption from it.

This ordering is central to the Palestinian question. Palestinians are not a test case imposed from outside Jewish life. They are the people whose dispossession is entangled with the modern Jewish national project. Therefore, Jewish ethics cannot treat them as remote strangers. They are the neighbor at the gate, the displaced person at the foundation, the occupied subject behind the wall, the refugee whose return threatens the demographic logic of Jewish sovereignty. To speak of covenant while ignoring Palestinians is to speak falsely.

A post-Zionist Jewish covenant would require truth-telling. It would require teaching the Nakba alongside Jewish catastrophe, not as equivalent events, but as entangled histories. It would require acknowledging that Jewish refuge was built partly through Palestinian displacement. It would require refusing educational systems that protect Jewish children from Palestinian memory. It would require mourning without competition. It would require Jews to learn that their liberation narrative may be experienced by another people as disaster.

This is painful, but covenantal traditions often demand painful memory. Jewish life is full of rituals that remember failure, exile, destruction, slavery, repentance, and loss. A Judaism that can remember Pharaoh, Amalek, Babylon, Rome, Spain, Kishinev, and Auschwitz must also develop the courage to remember what was done to Palestinians in the name of Jewish national restoration. Without that courage, memory becomes selective and covenant becomes ideology.

Universal justice also requires a future orientation. It is not enough to confess the past. A Judaism after Zionism must ask what political forms could allow Jews and Palestinians to live without supremacy. This may involve one state, two states, confederation, equal citizenship, binational frameworks, reparative return, or other arrangements not yet fully imaginable. The exact solution is beyond the scope of this section. The ethical principle is not: Jews must disappear. It is: Jewish safety cannot require Palestinian subordination. Any future that violates this principle remains morally unstable.

Exile after Zionism may therefore become a source of renewal rather than despair. Diaspora Jews can recover an identity not organized around defending a state, but around bearing witness, building community, protecting minorities, studying tradition, and joining struggles for justice. This does not make diaspora easy. Assimilation, antisemitism, fragmentation, and spiritual emptiness remain dangers. But Zionism has not solved those dangers. It has merely redirected Jewish anxiety toward state power. Diaspora Judaism must face them directly.

The reconstruction of memory, covenant, exile, and universal justice is ultimately a theological and ethical task. It asks Jews to remember without weaponizing memory, to love their people without worshiping their people, to preserve tradition without turning it into nationalism, and to seek safety without domination. This is a demanding vision. But after Gaza, after occupation, after the collapse of moral deference, anything less may fail to persuade the next generation.

**11.3 Palestinian Liberation as a Test of Jewish Ethics**

Palestinian liberation has become one of the decisive tests of Jewish ethics in the modern world. This statement does not mean that Jews are responsible for every aspect of Palestinian politics, nor that Palestinians exist only as instruments for Jewish moral development. Palestinians are a people in their own right, and their liberation matters first because they are human beings entitled to freedom, dignity, land, memory, movement, citizenship, and safety.

But for Jews, and especially for Jews whose institutions have defended or supported Israel, Palestine presents an unavoidable ethical test because Palestinian suffering has been produced and justified in the name of Jewish survival.

The test is simple to state and difficult to face: can Jews recognize the humanity and rights of the people harmed by the Jewish state project? Can Jews hear Palestinian memory without immediately converting it into threat? Can Jews oppose antisemitism without using antisemitism to silence Palestinians? Can Jews preserve their own trauma without making Palestinian trauma secondary? Can Jews imagine safety with Palestinians rather than safety from Palestinians?

Zionist institutions have often framed Palestinian liberation as a danger to Jewish existence. Sometimes this fear is expressed through concerns about terrorism, return, demography, sovereignty, or the fate of Israeli Jews in a hostile region. These concerns cannot simply be dismissed. Any future must address Jewish safety concretely. But if every serious form of Palestinian freedom is treated as an existential threat, then Jewish safety has been defined as permanent Palestinian unfreedom. That is the moral crisis.

A Jewish ethic worthy of the name cannot accept permanent domination as the price of survival. It cannot accept that one people must live under blockade, occupation, exile, or unequal rights so that another people may feel secure. It cannot accept that children inherit dispossession because adults inherit trauma. It cannot accept that the memory of Jewish suffering makes Palestinian suffering negotiable. If Jewish ethics collapses at the point where Palestinians demand freedom, then it has become tribal self-defense rather than ethics.

Palestinian liberation tests Jewish truthfulness. Jews must be able to say what happened and what is happening. They must be able to name displacement, occupation, settlement, siege, military law, unequal citizenship, home demolition, imprisonment, land seizure, and bombardment without hiding behind euphemism. Truth is not antisemitism. Truth is the beginning of repair. A community that cannot tell the truth about the suffering connected to its own political project cannot claim moral seriousness.

Palestinian liberation also tests Jewish memory. The question is not whether Jewish suffering will be remembered. It must be. The question is whether memory can become expansive rather than defensive. Can the memory of Jewish refugees open Jewish hearts to Palestinian refugees? Can the memory of ghettos sharpen Jewish opposition to enclosure and siege? Can the memory of statelessness deepen Jewish concern for people denied political rights? Can the memory of dehumanization prevent Jews from dehumanizing? These are not simplistic comparisons. They are ethical applications of memory.

Palestinian liberation tests Jewish theology as well. If every human being is created with dignity, then Palestinians are not obstacles in a Jewish redemption story. If justice is central to covenant, then Jewish sovereignty cannot be exempt from justice. If the stranger must be remembered because Jews were strangers, then Palestinians cannot be treated as demographic threats alone. If repentance is real, then collective institutions must be capable of confession and change. If idolatry includes worship of power, then the Jewish state can become an idol when it demands moral obedience.

The test also concerns Jewish courage. It is easy to speak of justice in general. It is harder to speak when doing so risks communal exclusion. Jews who support Palestinian liberation may lose friends, donors, platforms, jobs, family peace, or synagogue belonging. Yet ethical traditions are measured by what they demand when obedience becomes costly. If Jewish ethics requires nothing when Palestinians are crushed, then it has become ceremonial rather than prophetic.

A post-Zionist Jewish politics would not treat Palestinian liberation as charity. Palestinians do not need Jewish benevolence. They need rights. They need freedom from domination. They need return, repair, equality, and political agency. Jewish solidarity must therefore avoid paternalism. It must not center Jewish guilt or Jewish redemption at the expense of Palestinian leadership. The role of Jews is not to supervise Palestinian liberation, but to stop defending the structures that prevent it and to join in the work of dismantling them.

This solidarity must also reject revenge. Palestinian liberation must not mean Jewish vulnerability, expulsion, or collective punishment. A future built on reversal of domination would reproduce the moral logic it claims to overcome. Jewish anti-Zionism must therefore articulate a vision in which Palestinians are free and Jews are safe, not because Jewish safety overrides Palestinian rights, but because no just future can be built on the terror of either people. This is the most difficult political task: to oppose Jewish supremacy without endorsing Jewish insecurity.

The test of Jewish ethics also reaches American Jews specifically. American Jews live in the country that arms, funds, protects, and diplomatically shields Israel. Their responsibility is therefore not symbolic only. They are citizens, voters, donors, students, professors, journalists, clergy, lawyers, organizers, and members of institutions that influence policy. To say “not in our name” is a beginning, but not an end. The deeper question is what American Jews will do with their actual political power. Will they use it to defend unconditional aid, or to stop it? To silence Palestinian speech, or to protect it? To discipline anti-Zionist students, or to stand with them? To preserve communal comfort, or to confront communal complicity?

Palestinian liberation also tests whether Judaism can survive the end of innocence. Many Jewish institutions have told a story in which Jews are victims who became sovereign in order to survive. Palestinian history complicates that story by showing that Jewish refuge involved another people's dispossession. This does not erase Jewish suffering. It ends Jewish innocence. But the end of innocence need not be the end of Jewish identity. It can be the beginning of moral adulthood. A mature Jewish identity can hold grief and responsibility together.

The younger generation understands this more readily than many institutions. They are less persuaded by narratives that require choosing between Jewish memory and Palestinian truth. They want both. They want a Jewishness that can mourn the Holocaust and the Nakba without collapsing them into equivalence or forcing them into competition. They want to oppose antisemitism and Islamophobia. They want to preserve Jewish life without defending apartheid-like realities. They want to be Jewish without becoming guardians of state violence. Whether they can build durable institutions around this desire remains uncertain, but the desire itself is historically significant.

Palestinian liberation is therefore not external to the future of Judaism. It is one of the places where Judaism's future will be decided. If Jewish institutions continue to treat Palestinian freedom as a threat, they may preserve loyalty among some but lose moral authority among many others. If Jewish communities can support Palestinian rights while protecting Jews from antisemitism, they may recover a deeper ethical credibility. If diaspora Judaism can detach itself from domination and attach itself to justice, it may find renewal after Zionism.

The test is severe because the stakes are real. Palestinians are not abstractions. Israeli Jews are not abstractions. Diaspora Jews are not abstractions. Fear, grief, rage, memory, and land are all real. But ethics exists precisely because reality is difficult. A Jewish ethics that functions only when Jews are powerless is incomplete. The modern test is whether Jewish ethics can govern Jewish power.

Palestinian liberation asks Jews to answer that test. Not with slogans alone, and not with sentimental universalism, but with concrete commitments: equal rights, truthful history, opposition to collective punishment, rejection of supremacy, protection of civilians, freedom of movement, an end to occupation and siege, repair for dispossession, and a political future in which no people's safety depends on another people's humiliation.

A Judaism after Zionism will be judged by whether it can say yes to those commitments. If it can, then the collapse of the Zionist consensus may become not only a crisis but a renewal. If it cannot, then Jewish identity will remain bound to a state project that many Jews increasingly experience as a betrayal of the very ethics they were taught to honor.

## 12. Conclusion: The End of the Postwar Zionist Monopoly

The rise of visible Jewish anti-Zionism in New York marks the end of an era in American Jewish public life. It does not mean that Zionism has disappeared, that support for Israel has collapsed, or that anti-Zionist Jews have become the majority. Zionist institutions remain powerful. Many Jews remain deeply attached to Israel through family, religion, memory, fear, language, politics, philanthropy, and historical identification. The State of Israel remains militarily strong, diplomatically protected, and central to American foreign policy. Yet the older monopoly has broken. The assumption that Jewish identity, Jewish safety, Jewish memory, and support for Israel naturally belong together can no longer command silence.

This is the central conclusion of the paper. The postwar Zionist consensus was not merely a political preference. It was a full moral architecture. It joined Holocaust memory, American Jewish upward mobility, communal institution-building, U.S. foreign policy, philanthropy, religious symbolism, and the emotional need for Jewish security into a powerful public story. That story taught generations of American Jews that Israel was not simply a state but the answer to Jewish catastrophe, the symbol of Jewish dignity, the refuge after abandonment, and the center around which diaspora identity could organize itself. For many, that story remains compelling. For others, especially younger and anti-Zionist Jews, it has become morally unbearable.

The rupture has occurred because Israel can no longer be experienced only as refuge. It is also experienced as occupier, besieger, military power, ethnonational state, and beneficiary of American weapons and diplomatic protection. Gaza has intensified this transformation because the scale and visibility of Palestinian suffering have made older forms of moral deference difficult to sustain. For many Jews, the inherited language of security, complexity, democracy, and self-defense no longer explains what they see. The result is a crisis not only of policy, but of identity. If the state that claims to act for Jewish survival is experienced as an agent of Palestinian destruction, then Jewish identity organized around that state enters crisis.

New York is central because the rupture appears where the old consensus is most symbolically concentrated. The city is a capital of diaspora Jewish life, institutional power, media visibility, donor influence, academic debate, synagogue culture, and street protest. Jewish anti-Zionism in New York is therefore not simply local activism. It is a challenge at the symbolic center of American Jewish authority. It says that the institutions claiming to speak for Jews do not speak for all Jews, that Jewish memory does not belong only to Zionists, and that Judaism cannot be reduced to defense of Israeli state power.

The argument advanced in this paper is that Jewish anti-Zionism should be understood as an internal Jewish rupture, not as an external attack on Jewish life. It draws from older religious,

socialist, diasporist, and universalist traditions. It is sharpened by contemporary human rights language, anti-imperial analysis, student activism, Palestinian solidarity, and distrust of elite institutions. It is not uniform. It contains religious anti-Zionists, secular radicals, former liberal Zionists, anti-occupation activists, journalists, rabbis, students, and ordinary Jews who have reached a point of refusal. What unites them is not a single doctrine but the rejection of one claim: that Jewish identity requires loyalty to Zionism.

The significance of this rejection is enormous. Once Jews publicly refuse Zionism, the old structure of accusation weakens. Criticism of Israel can no longer be framed simply as hostility to Jews. Anti-Zionism can no longer be dismissed as entirely foreign to Jewish history. Palestinian solidarity can no longer be excluded from Jewish ethical life. Politicians can no longer honestly invoke "the Jewish community" as if it were unified behind Israel. Universities can no longer claim that every anti-Zionist action threatens all Jewish students. Media institutions can no longer treat establishment organizations as the only Jewish voices. The symbolic field has changed.

This does not make the future simple. The distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism must be preserved with seriousness. Real antisemitism exists and can enter anti-Israel spaces through conspiracy, collective blame, Holocaust denial, demonization of Jews, or attacks on Jewish institutions. A responsible Jewish anti-Zionism must reject these corruptions clearly. At the same time, accusations of antisemitism must not be used to shield Israel from accountability, silence Palestinians, discipline Jewish dissent, or preserve donor power. The moral task is precision: Jews are not Israel, Judaism is not Zionism, Zionism is not beyond critique, and Palestinian liberation is not hatred of Jews.

The end of the Zionist monopoly does not resolve the Jewish question. It reopens it. What is Jewish peoplehood without compulsory attachment to a state? What is Jewish safety without ethnonational sovereignty? What is Holocaust memory when detached from Israeli military legitimacy? What is diaspora not as weakness, but as vocation? What is covenant when state power claims sacred inheritance? What is solidarity when the people whose suffering was once central to Jewish memory are asked to recognize the suffering of Palestinians? These questions will define the next stage of American Jewish life.

The conclusion of this paper is therefore not that Jewish anti-Zionism has already won. It has not. The conclusion is that the old consensus can no longer govern uncontested. The Jewish future is now openly divided.

### 12.1 The Meaning of the New York Rupture

The meaning of the New York rupture lies in its location, visibility, and symbolic reversal. New York is not a marginal Jewish place. It is one of the great centers of Jewish modernity. It contains

the memory of immigrant life, Yiddish radicalism, religious pluralism, upward mobility, cultural production, philanthropy, Holocaust memorialization, Zionist fundraising, media influence, university debate, and political power. To see Jewish anti-Zionism become visible there is to see dissent emerge not at the edge of American Jewish life but near its center.

The rupture matters because it makes division undeniable. For decades, establishment organizations could speak of Jewish communal support for Israel with relatively little public contradiction. Dissent existed, but it was often contained, privatized, or dismissed as marginal. Today, Jewish anti-Zionists appear in protests, student movements, public letters, prayer actions, alternative congregations, independent journalism, and interfaith coalitions. They do not ask permission to speak as Jews. They speak, and their speech becomes a fact that institutions must confront.

This visibility changes the meaning of Jewish representation. The phrase “the Jewish community” can no longer be used honestly without qualification. There are Jewish communities, Jewish institutions, Jewish publics, Jewish factions, and Jewish arguments. Zionist organizations may still represent many Jews. They may still possess money, access, and organizational power. But they cannot plausibly claim to exhaust Jewish conscience. Anti-Zionist Jews have made representation contested.

New York intensifies this contest because institutional power is physically proximate to dissent. The same city contains major synagogues, donors, advocacy organizations, universities, cultural institutions, publishing networks, Palestinian solidarity groups, and anti-Zionist Jewish activists. The conflict becomes visible in public space. A protest can move from a campus to a street to a synagogue-adjacent institution to a politician’s office to a media platform. New York turns ideological conflict into civic drama.

The rupture also matters because New York embodies diaspora success. Jewish life in the city contradicts the idea that diaspora is merely failure, passivity, or waiting. Jews in New York have built durable religious, cultural, intellectual, economic, and political worlds without Jewish sovereignty. This does not erase the dangers of diaspora or the history of antisemitism, but it does show that Jewish life outside Israel is not inherently incomplete. Anti-Zionist Jews in New York can therefore draw on the city’s own history as evidence that Jewish flourishing does not require an ethnostate.

The New York rupture is also a generational signal. Younger Jews who join anti-Zionist movements are not merely rejecting their parents’ politics. They are rejecting an inherited moral arrangement. Many were taught that Jewish memory produces responsibility, that silence in the face of injustice is dangerous, and that the vulnerable must be protected. When they apply these lessons to Palestinians, they often find themselves in conflict with the institutions

that taught them those values. Their dissent is therefore not simply rebellion. It is a demand for consistency.

This generational dimension is one reason institutional responses can backfire. When organizations respond to dissent primarily with accusation, exclusion, or donor pressure, they may confirm the dissident claim that the old consensus is maintained by discipline rather than truth. Young Jews who feel morally betrayed by Israel may become more alienated when Jewish institutions demand loyalty instead of offering honest reckoning. In this sense, the attempt to contain anti-Zionism can produce more anti-Zionism.

The rupture also exposes the limits of liberal Zionism. New York has long been a home for liberal Jewish politics, including forms of Zionism that support Israel while criticizing occupation or right-wing governments. But the Gaza war and the long failure of the peace process have made this position harder to sustain for many. If occupation is permanent, if Palestinian inequality is structural, if Gaza is repeatedly devastated, and if U.S. aid continues without serious conditions, then liberal Zionism can appear less like moral balance and more like indefinite postponement. Anti-Zionist Jews press this point forcefully: if the system does not change, criticism without rupture becomes complicity.

The New York rupture also has national and international meaning. Because the city is a media center, its images travel. Jewish protesters arrested in New York, rabbis calling for ceasefire, students rejecting Zionism, or dissident journalists exposing institutional power can become symbols far beyond the city. These images alter the public perception of Jewish opinion. They show that support for Palestinian liberation is not only an Arab, Muslim, leftist, or external demand. It is also a Jewish demand.

This visibility changes the strategic landscape for Palestinian solidarity. Jewish anti-Zionist participation does not validate Palestinian suffering, which is real regardless of Jewish recognition. But it does disrupt one of the main defenses used against Palestinian advocacy in the United States: the claim that anti-Zionism is inherently anti-Jewish. When Jews themselves reject Zionism, the debate must become more precise. That precision is politically threatening to institutions that rely on category collapse.

The rupture also reveals the fragility of moral authority built on unity. A consensus that depends on silence is not stable once the silence breaks. Jewish anti-Zionists have broken the silence in a city where the old consensus expected deference. This does not mean they have replaced the institutions they oppose. But they have ended the illusion that those institutions can speak without challenge.

The meaning of the New York rupture, then, is not merely that some Jews oppose Israel. That has always been true. The meaning is that Jewish anti-Zionism has become public, organized,

ritualized, and difficult to marginalize at the symbolic center of American Jewish life. It has become a rival Jewish public. That is the historical change.

**12.2 The Future of American Jewish Identity**

The future of American Jewish identity will be shaped by whether Jewish life can survive the collapse of Israel as its uncontested center. For many decades, Israel helped solve the problem of Jewish continuity in an assimilating America. It gave secular Jews a collective anchor, religious Jews a sacred geography, philanthropists a cause, educators a curriculum, politicians a moral language, and families a story of survival. Even Jews who did not live religiously could feel Jewish through attachment to Israel. Zionism became, for many, the civic religion of postwar American Jewishness.

That model is now unstable. The instability does not come only from anti-Zionist activism. It comes from the moral trajectory of Israel itself, from the visibility of Palestinian suffering, from the rightward movement of Israeli politics, from the decline of trust in institutions, from generational change, and from the inability of inherited narratives to answer basic ethical questions. American Jewish identity cannot remain unchanged when the state placed at its center becomes a source of division rather than unity.

Several futures are possible. One future is defensive consolidation. Zionist institutions may respond to dissent by tightening boundaries, increasing Israel education, expanding antisemitism enforcement, pressuring universities, rewarding loyal politicians, and treating anti-Zionist Jews as marginal or dangerous. This path may preserve institutional control in the short term, especially among donors and older constituencies. But it risks deepening alienation among younger Jews and driving dissent into more explicit anti-Zionism.

A second future is liberal Zionist reform. Institutions may acknowledge Palestinian suffering more honestly, criticize Israeli policy more strongly, support limits on settlement expansion, defend democratic norms, and attempt to distinguish love for Israel from support for its government. This path may retain Jews who remain emotionally attached to Israel but morally disturbed. Yet its success depends on whether the underlying political reality can still support liberal Zionist hope. If permanent inequality continues, reform language may lose credibility.

A third future is post-Zionist pluralism. In this model, American Jewish institutions would stop making attachment to Israel a test of belonging. Zionists, non-Zionists, post-Zionists, and anti-Zionists could share communal spaces without requiring ideological conformity. Jewish education would teach Israel, Palestine, the Holocaust, the Nakba, diaspora history, religious tradition, and the history of Jewish debate honestly. Synagogues would not require loyalty to Israeli state legitimacy. Jewish identity would become more plural and less state-centered. This

future is difficult but potentially stabilizing, because it would acknowledge the division rather than deny it.

A fourth future is open schism. Zionist and anti-Zionist Jewish worlds may increasingly separate into different institutions, synagogues, schools, media ecosystems, donor networks, political coalitions, and ritual spaces. This process is already underway in partial form. Some Jews feel unable to remain in synagogues that defend Israel. Some Zionist Jews feel unable to share community with anti-Zionists. Some families avoid the subject. Some friendships end. Some institutions split or harden. If the gap between Jewish ethical visions becomes too wide, common communal life may become impossible in many settings.

The future will likely contain all four tendencies. Some institutions will harden. Some will reform. Some will pluralize. Some will split. American Jewish identity will not move in one direction because Jews are not a single political subject. The old dream of communal unity may itself be part of what must be relinquished. Jewish life has always contained argument. The task is not to eliminate division but to prevent division from becoming moral excommunication.

A central question will be whether Jewish education can tell the truth. If Jewish schools, camps, synagogues, and youth programs continue to teach Israel through selective memory, many young Jews will eventually experience discovery as betrayal. If they are taught Palestinian history honestly, some may become anti-Zionist, but they may also retain trust in Jewish institutions. The choice is not between preserving Zionism and destroying it. The choice is between education as formation and education as concealment. Concealment cannot survive in the digital age.

Another question is whether American Jewish identity can recover diaspora as a positive form. For too long, diaspora has often been treated as emotionally secondary to Israel. Yet American Jewish life has its own dignity, history, obligations, and dangers. The future may require a Judaism rooted more in local community, study, ritual, justice, interfaith solidarity, and minority protection than in symbolic attachment to a state. Such a Judaism would not erase Zion from memory, but it would refuse to make Zionism the measure of Jewish seriousness.

The future will also depend on how Jews understand safety. If safety continues to mean unconditional support for Israeli military dominance, the split will deepen. If safety can be reimagined through pluralism, civil rights, alliances, anti-hate work, and solidarity with other vulnerable communities, then American Jewish identity may find a path beyond ethnonational fear. This does not mean abandoning concern for Israeli Jews. It means refusing to define their safety through Palestinian subordination.

American Jewish identity must also confront the moral burden of U.S. citizenship. American Jews are not merely diaspora observers. They live in the country that arms, funds, and protects

Israel. Their taxes, votes, institutions, media, donors, and politicians are implicated. This gives American Jews a particular responsibility. To say that Israel does not represent all Jews is important, but it is not enough. American Jews must decide how they will act within the American system that sustains Israel.

The future of Jewish identity will also be affected by the broader American crisis of institutions. Young people distrust legacy media, political parties, universities, religious authorities, donors, and official narratives. Jewish institutions are not exempt from this distrust. If they appear to manage truth rather than seek it, they will lose authority. If they can acknowledge failure, allow dissent, and rebuild trust through honesty, they may survive the rupture in transformed form.

The deepest future question is spiritual. What will make Jewish life meaningful after Zionism loses its monopoly? The answer cannot be only opposition. Anti-Zionist Judaism must build, not merely negate. It must offer learning, ritual, community, memory, care, joy, mourning, holidays, language, intergenerational transmission, and protection against antisemitism. If it cannot build durable forms of Jewish life, it may remain a protest identity rather than a civilizational alternative. The challenge is to create Jewish continuity without state worship.

This is already beginning. Anti-Zionist Jews are creating prayer spaces, study groups, public rituals, media projects, mutual aid networks, campus organizations, and coalitions. These are early forms, uneven and contested, but they show that Jewish identity after Zionism is not empty. It can be filled with Torah, ethics, memory, solidarity, music, grief, argument, and political courage. It can be intensely Jewish precisely because it refuses to outsource Jewish meaning to a state.

The future of American Jewish identity will therefore not be decided only in Israel. It will be decided in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia, synagogues, campuses, family homes, donor meetings, protests, classrooms, and online spaces. It will be decided wherever Jews ask whether inherited loyalty still deserves obedience. It will be decided wherever Jews choose between silence and speech.

The old postwar consensus answered the question of Jewish identity with Israel at the center. The next era will not have one answer. It will be plural, fractured, painful, and perhaps more honest. The future of American Jewish life may depend on whether Jews can accept that division without destroying one another.

### 12.3 From Consensus to Open Schism

The movement from consensus to open schism is the final significance of the present moment. The postwar Zionist consensus did not require every Jew to agree on every policy. It required a shared boundary: Israel remained within the circle of Jewish loyalty, and anti-Zionism remained

outside respectable Jewish speech. That boundary is now broken. Anti-Zionist Jews are inside the argument, visible and organized. They cannot be wished away.

Open schism means that American Jewish life now contains incompatible moral visions. For Zionists, Jewish survival requires the preservation of Israel as a Jewish state. For anti-Zionists, Jewish ethics requires opposition to a state structure that privileges Jews over Palestinians. For liberal Zionists, the task is to rescue Israel from occupation, extremism, and democratic decay. For post-Zionists, the task is to imagine Jewish and Palestinian futures beyond the inherited state framework. These positions do not merely differ over tactics. They differ over first principles.

Schism is painful because it divides memory. The same historical events produce opposite conclusions. The Holocaust teaches one Jew that Jews need sovereign power. It teaches another that no state should be allowed to dehumanize a trapped population. The founding of Israel teaches one Jew that Jewish dignity was restored. It teaches another that Palestinian dispossession was made the price of Jewish repair. The phrase “never again” means Jewish self-defense to one Jew and universal opposition to dehumanization to another. Shared memory no longer produces shared politics.

Schism also divides institutions. Synagogues, schools, universities, federations, families, and cultural organizations must decide how much dissent they can tolerate. Some will maintain Zionist boundaries. Some will become pluralist. Some will split. Some will avoid the subject until avoidance becomes impossible. Every choice has consequences. To include anti-Zionists may alienate Zionists. To exclude anti-Zionists may alienate younger Jews and dissenters. To remain silent may satisfy no one. The old luxury of presumed unity is gone.

Open schism also changes the meaning of antisemitism debates. Under the consensus, pro-Israel institutions could often define Jewish safety in ways that aligned with Zionist priorities. Under schism, Jewish safety itself becomes contested. Some Jews feel unsafe when Israel is condemned. Others feel unsafe when anti-Zionist speech is labeled antisemitic. Some Jews fear Palestinian solidarity movements. Others fear the fusion of Jewish identity with Israeli violence. Some Jews want stronger institutional policing. Others want stronger protection for dissent. There is no single Jewish experience of safety.

This does not mean all claims are equally valid in every case. It means that institutions can no longer assume one Jewish standpoint. They must reason, distinguish, and judge. That is harder than consensus, but more honest.

The schism also affects American politics. Politicians who once relied on establishment Jewish organizations as proxies for Jewish opinion must now navigate visible Jewish division. Some will continue to follow donor power and traditional alliances. Others will cite anti-Zionist Jews to

defend criticism of Israel. Some will attempt symbolic balance. Some will weaponize the division. The result will be a more contested political field. Israel advocacy will remain powerful, but it will face a legitimacy challenge from Jews themselves.

Open schism may also produce harsher rhetoric. As consensus collapses, each side may intensify accusations. Zionists may accuse anti-Zionists of endangering Jews. Anti-Zionists may accuse Zionists of enabling atrocity. Liberal Zionists may accuse both sides of absolutism. Palestinians may distrust Jewish debates that still center Jewish identity. Non-Jewish activists may mishandle Jewish fears. Donors may pressure institutions more aggressively. Students may radicalize faster. Families may fracture more deeply. Schism is not automatically liberating. It can be destructive.

Yet schism can also be clarifying. False unity has moral costs. A community that suppresses fundamental disagreement preserves peace at the price of truth. Open schism forces hidden questions into public view. Does Judaism require Zionism? Can a Jewish state be democratic if it privileges Jews? Can Palestinian liberation coexist with Jewish safety? Can Jewish memory be universalized without being erased? Can antisemitism be fought without shielding Israel? Can diaspora Judaism become central again? These questions were always present. Schism makes them unavoidable.

The end of consensus also opens the possibility of moral renewal. When inherited narratives lose authority, traditions can be reread. Jews can recover diasporist, prophetic, rabbinic, socialist, mystical, anti-nationalist, and universalist resources neglected by Israel-centered identity. They can build communities that do not require denial of Palestinian suffering. They can form coalitions against antisemitism and anti-Palestinian racism together. They can teach children history without concealment. They can mourn Jewish and Palestinian dead without competition. They can seek safety without supremacy.

Such renewal will not be easy because the material structures of Zionist power remain strong. States, armies, lobbies, donors, institutions, and media systems do not dissolve because moral arguments change. Anti-Zionist Jews may win symbolic battles while policy remains unchanged. They may gain visibility while Gaza remains destroyed, occupation continues, and U.S. aid flows. The distance between moral witness and political transformation is large. But witness matters because legitimacy matters. Systems of power require stories. Jewish anti-Zionism attacks one of the stories that sustains the system.

The schism is therefore both internal and geopolitical. Inside Jewish life, it is a fight over identity. In American politics, it is a fight over the moral legitimacy of U.S. support for Israel. In relation to Palestinians, it is a fight over whether Jewish memory will continue to obscure Palestinian memory or finally stand beside it. In theology, it is a fight over whether covenant is

fulfilled by state power or judged against justice. In history, it is a fight over whether the twentieth-century Zionist answer to Jewish vulnerability remains persuasive in the twenty-first century.

The conclusion of this paper is that the postwar Zionist monopoly has ended, but the post-Zionist future has not yet been born. We are living in the interval between collapse and reconstruction. The old institutions still speak, but their authority is contested. The new movements speak, but their durability is unproven. The old memory still wounds, but it no longer commands a single politics. The new ethics demands equality, but it must still build forms capable of sustaining Jewish life. The schism is real, but its outcome is open.

New York is the proper place to see this interval because New York contains both the old world and the new. It contains donors and dissidents, synagogues and street prayers, Zionist institutions and anti-Zionist Jews, Holocaust memory and Palestinian solidarity, media power and alternative journalism, elite respectability and public disruption. The city is a living map of the fracture. What happens there will not determine everything, but it reveals the direction of the struggle.

The future of American Jewish life will depend on whether Jews can transform schism into honest argument rather than permanent excommunication. It will depend on whether Zionists can hear Palestinian suffering without defensiveness, whether anti-Zionists can oppose Zionism without minimizing Jewish fear, whether institutions can tolerate dissent, whether movements can reject antisemitism with clarity, and whether diaspora Judaism can recover the confidence to stand on its own.

The old consensus said that Jewish survival required Zionism. The new rupture asks whether Jewish survival may require liberation from Zionism. That question now stands at the center of American Jewish life. It cannot be unasked.

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TRUTH.
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